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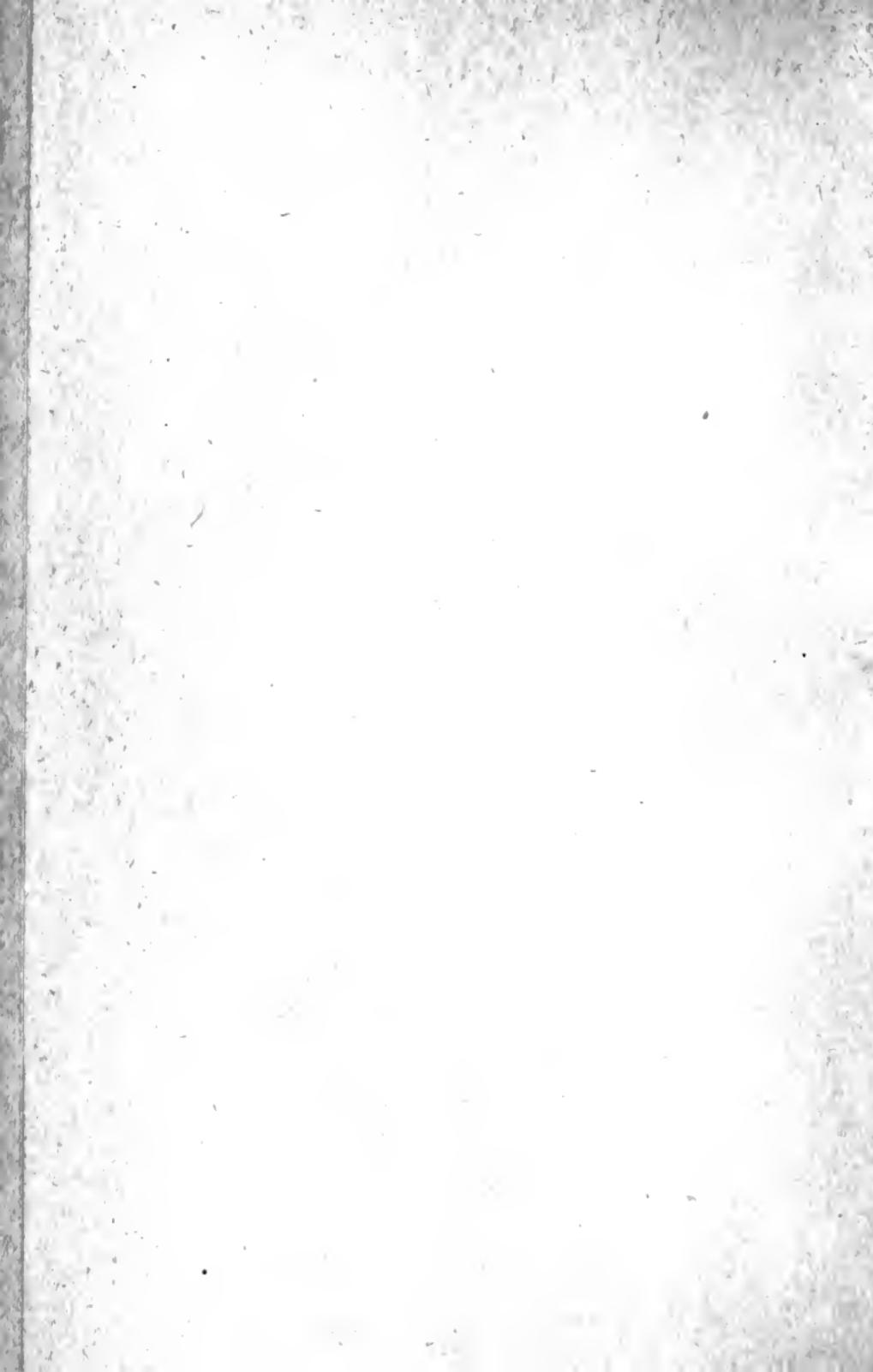
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I N T R U S T

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# IN TRUST

*THE STORY OF A LADY AND HER LOVER*

BY

M. O. W. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'THE CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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# IN TRUST.

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## CHAPTER I.

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

‘My dear, the case is as plain as noonday ; you must give this man up.’

‘The case is not plain to me, father—at least, not in your sense.’

‘Anne, you are very positive and self-opinionated, but you cannot—it is not possible—set up your judgment against mine on such a point. You, an inexperienced, prejudiced girl, a rustic with no knowledge of the world ! What do you know about the man ? Oh, I allow he is well enough to look at ; he has had the usual amount of education, and so

forth ; but what do you *know* about him ? that is what I ask.'

'Not much, father,' said Anne, steadily ; 'but I know *him*.'

'Stuff ! you, a girl not much over twenty, know a *man* ! Does he tell you, do you suppose, all the adventures of his life ? Does he confess his sins to you ? A young fellow that has been trained at a public school, that has been at the university, that has knocked about the world—is he going to confide all that to *you* ? He would be unworthy the name of gentleman if he did.'

'Would he not be more unworthy the name of gentleman if he had done things which he could not confide to me ?' said Anne ; then reddening suddenly, she added, 'And even if it were so, father, if in those days he had done things unfit for my ears, let him be silent ; I will not ask any questions : I know what he is now.'

'Oh, stuff, I tell you ! stuff and nonsense, child ! You know what he is *now* ! Yes, what he is when his best coat is on, when he is going to church with

his hymn-book in his pocket and you on his arm ; that is a very edifying aspect of him ; but if you think that is all, or nearly all——'

Anne was silent. It was not that she was convinced, but that her indignation took words from her. She could not make any reply to such calumnies ; and this was troublesome to her father, who preferred an argument to a distinct and unsupported statement. He looked at her for a moment, baffled, feeling himself cut short in the full flow of utterance—then picked up the thread again, and resumed :

‘ You would be a fool to trust in any man in that unguarded way : and above all in a lawyer. They are all rogues ; it is in them. When did you ever hear a good word spoken for that class of men ? I will not consent to any such nonsense : and if you act without my consent, you know the consequence. I will not give your mother’s money to maintain in luxury a man who is—who will be—never mind ! You shall not have it. I will give it to Rose, as I have the power.’

‘ You would not be so unjust,’ said Anne.

'Unjust! I will do it if you defy me in this way. Rose has always been a better child to me than you have been; and she shall have the money if you don't mind.'

Whoever had looked at Anne Mountford then would not have given much for the chance of her submission. She said nothing, but her upper lip shut down upon the lower with an unrelenting, immovable determination. She would not even add a word to her protest against the possibility of the injustice with which she had been threatened. She was too proud to repeat herself; she stood still, unbending, betraying no impatience, ready to receive with calmness everything that might be said to her, but firm as the house upon its foundations, or the hills that are called everlasting. Her father knew something of the character of his eldest child; he knew very well that no small argument would move her, but perhaps he was not aware how far beyond his power she was. He looked at her, however, with a passionate annoyance very different from her calm, and with something vindictive and almost spiteful in

his reddish-grey eyes. Most likely he had felt himself dashed against the wall of her strong will before now, and had been exasperated by the calm force of opposition which he could make no head against.

‘ You hear what I say,’ he repeated roughly ; ‘ if you insist, I shall exercise the right your mother gave me ; I shall alter my will : and the fortune which is no doubt your chief attraction in this man’s eyes—the fortune he has been calculating upon—I will give to Rose. You hear what I say ? ’

‘ Yes,’ said Anne. She bowed her head gravely ; no doubt that she understood him, and equally no doubt that what he said had moved her as much as a shower of rain might have done, and that she was fully determined to take her own way.

‘ On your own head be it then,’ he cried.

She bowed again, and after waiting for a moment to see if he had anything further to say to her, went quietly out of the room. It was in the library of a country house that this interview had taken place--the commonplace business room of a country gentleman of no very great pretensions. The walls were lined

with bookcases in which there was a tolerable collection of books, but yet they did not tell for much in the place. They were furniture like the curtains, which were rather shabby, and the old Turkey carpet--most respectable furniture, yet a little neglected, wanting renewal. Mr. Mountford's writing-table was laden with papers; he had plenty of business to transact, though not of a strictly intellectual kind. He was an old man, still handsome in his age, with picturesque snow-white hair in masses, clearly-cut, fine features, and keen eyes of that reddish hazel which betokens temper. Those eyes constantly burned under the somewhat projecting eyebrows. They threw a sort of angry lurid light on his face. The name of the house was Mount; it had been in the Mountford family for many generations; but it was not a beautiful and dignified house any more than he was a fine old English gentleman. Both the place and the man had traditional rights to popular respect, but neither man nor place had enforced this claim by any individual beauty or excellence. There was no doubt as to

the right of the Mountfords to be ranked among the gentry of the district, as good as the best, in so far that the family had been settled there for centuries ; but they were of that curiously commonplace strain which is prevalent enough among the smaller gentry, without any splendour of wealth to dazzle the beholder, and which rouses in the mind of the spectator a wonder as to what it is that makes the squire superior to his neighbours. The Mountfords from father to son had got on through the world without any particular harm or good, uninteresting, ordinary people, respectable enough, yet not even very respectable. They were not rich, they were not able ; they had nothing in themselves to distinguish them from the rest of the world ; yet wherever the name of Mountford appeared, throughout all the southern counties at least, the claims of its possessor to gentility were founded on his relationship to the Mountfords of Mount. Most curious of all the triumphs of the aristocratical principle ! Or rather perhaps it is the more human principle of continuance which is the foundation of this prejudice to

which we are all more or less subject. A family which has lasted, which has had obstinacy enough to cling to its bit of soil, to its old house, must have something in it worth respect. This principle, however, tells in favour of the respectable shopkeeper quite as much as the squire, but it does not tell in the same way. The Mountfords felt themselves of an entirely different order from the shopkeeper—why, heaven knows! but their estimate was accepted by all the world.

Mount had the distinction of being entailed; it was not a large estate nor a valuable one, and it had been deeply mortgaged when the present Mr. Mountford, St. John by name, came of age. But he had married an heiress, who had liberated his acres and added greatly to his social importance. The first Mrs. Mountford had died early, leaving only one daughter, and at the same time her entire fortune in the hands of her husband, to do with it what he pleased. These were the days when public opinion was very unanimous as to the impropriety and unnecessariness of female rights of any kind, and everybody applauded Mrs.

Mountford for resisting all conditions, and putting herself and her child unreservedly in her husband's hands. He had re-married two years after her death, but unfortunately had succeeded in obtaining only another girl from unpropitious fate. His first wife's daughter was Anne, universally considered as the natural heiress of the considerable fortune which, after clearing the estate, had remained of her mother's money, and which her father had kept scrupulously 'in a napkin,' like the churl in the parable, neither increasing nor diminishing the store. The other daughter was Rose. Such was the household at Mount in the days when this history begins. The reigning Mrs. Mountford was a good sort of easy woman who did not count for much. She was one of the Codringtons of Carrisford —a 'very good family' of the same class as the Mountfords. Nothing could be better than the connections on both sides—or duller. But the girls were different. It is very hard to say why the girls should have been different—perhaps because the present new wave of life has distinctly affected the

girls more than any other class of society. At all events, the point was indisputable. Anne perhaps might have taken after her mother, who was of an entirely new stock, not a kind which had ever before been ingrafted on the steady-going family tree. She had come out of a race partly mercantile, partly diplomatic; her grandfather had been Spanish; it was even suspected that one of her ancestors had been a Jew. All kinds of out-of-the-way sources had furnished the blood which had been destined to mix with the slow current in the Mountford veins; and probably Anne had inherited certain bizarre qualities from this jumble. But Rose had no such mixed antecedents. There was not a drop of blood in her veins that did not belong to the county, and it was difficult to see how she could have 'taken after' her sister Anne, as was sometimes suggested, in respect to peculiarities which had come to Anne from her mother; but if she did not take after Anne, who *did* she take after, as Mrs. Mountford often demanded?

Rose was now eighteen and Anne just over one-

and-twenty. They were considered in the neighbourhood to be attractive girls. A household possessing two such daughters is naturally supposed to have all the elements of brightness within it ; and perhaps if there had been brothers the girls would have taken their natural place as harmonisers and peacemakers. But there were no brothers, and the girls embodied all the confusing and disturbing influences natural to boys in their own persons, with certain difficulties appropriate to their natural character. It is true they did not get into scrapes or into debt ; they were not expelled from school or ‘sent down’ from College. Duns did not follow them to the paternal door, or roistering companions break the family peace. But yet Anne and Rose contrived to give as much trouble to Mr. and Mrs. Mountford as if they had been Jack and Tom. These good people had lived for about a dozen years in their rural mansion like the cabbages in the kitchen garden. Nothing had disturbed them. There had been no call upon their reasoning faculties, no strain upon their affections : everything had gone on quite

tranquilly and comfortably, with that quiet persistence of well-being which makes trouble seem impossible. They had even said to themselves with sighs, that to have only girls was after all good for something. They could not be tormented as others were, or even as the rector, one of whose boys had gone ‘to the bad.’ The thing which had been was that which should be. The shocks, the discoveries, the commotions, which the restless elements involved in male youth bring with them, could not trouble their quiet existence. So they consoled themselves, although not without a sigh.

Alas, good people! they had reckoned without their girls. The first storm that arose in the house was when Anne suddenly discovered that her governess never detected her false notes when she played, and passed the mistakes which she made, on purpose to test her, in her grammar. ‘I want someone who can teach me,’ the girl said. She was only fifteen, but she had already made a great deal more use of that pernicious faculty of reading which works so much mischief in the world than Mrs. Mountford

approved. Someone who could teach her! That meant a lady at seventy-five or a hundred pounds a year, instead of thirty-five, which was what they had hitherto given. Mrs. Mountford nearly cried over this most unreasonable demand. Miss Montressor was very nice. She was of a family which had seen better days, and she was fully conscious of her good fortune in having gained an entry into a county family. After all, what did it matter about false notes or mistakes in grammar? It was a ladylike person that was everything. But when Rose too declared in her little treble that she wanted somebody who could teach her, Miss Montressor had to go; and the troubles that followed! To do them justice, the Squire and his wife did their very best to satisfy these unreasonable young people. They got a German governess with all kinds of certificates, who taught Rose to say ‘pon chour;’ they got a French lady, who commended herself to the best feelings of Mrs. Mountford’s nature by making her up the sweetest cap, but who taught the girls that Charles I. was all but rescued from the scaffold by

the generous exertions of a Gascon gentleman of the name of D'Artagnan and three friends who were devoted to him. Mrs. Mountford herself was much pleased with this information, but Anne and her father were of a different opinion. However, it would be too long to follow them minutely through all these troubles. At seventeen Anne wanted Greek and to 'go in for' examinations—which gave a still more complete blow to the prejudices of the house. 'The same as a young man!' It was improper in the highest degree, almost wicked; Mrs. Mountford did not like to think of it. It seemed to her, as to some of our ablest critics, that nothing but illicit longings after evil could make a girl wish to pass examinations and acquire knowledge. She must want to read the naughty books which are written in Greek and Latin, and which deprave the minds of young men, the good woman thought. As for the certificates and honours, they might be all very well for the governesses of whom Mrs. Mountford had such melancholy experience; but a young lady of a county family, what did she want with them?

They would be things to be ashamed, not proud of. And on this point Anne was vanquished. She was allowed to learn Greek with many forebodings, but not to be examined in her knowledge. However, this decision was chiefly intended to prevent Rose from following her sister, as she always did ; for to refuse Girton to Rose would have been more difficult than to neglect Anne's entreaties. For, though Anne was the eldest sister, it was Rose who was the princess royal and reigned over the whole demesne.

This desire of the higher education on the part of Rose, who still said 'pon chour,' and was not at all certain that two and two always make four, would have been enough to keep the house in commotion if there had not occurred just then one of the family troubles appropriate to girls after so many that could not be called feminine. It has already been said that the rector of the parish had a son who had 'gone to the bad.' He had two other sons, rocks ahead for the young ladies at Mount. Indeed these two young men were such obvious dangers that Mrs. Mountford had taken

precautions against them while Rose was still in her cradle. One was a curate, his father's probable successor; but as the living was in Mr. Mountford's hands, and it was always possible that someone else might be preferred to Charley, some Mountford connection who had a nearer claim, that prospect did not count for much. The other was nothing at all, a young man at Oxford, not yet launched upon life. But fortunately these young men, though very familiar in the house, were not handsome nor dangerously attractive, and this peril is one which must always be encountered in the country, even by people of much higher pretensions than the Mountfords. The first trouble, however, did not come from this obvious quarter, though it came through there. It was not one of the Ashleys; but it was a person still less satisfactory. One of the curate's friends arrived suddenly on a visit in the late summer—a young Mr. Douglas, a barrister, which sounds well enough; but not one of the Douglasses who have ever been heard of. They did not find this out for some time, imagining fondly that he be-

longed, at a distance perhaps, to the Morton family, or to the house of Queensberry, or at least to Douglasses in Scotland, of whom it could be said that they were of Lanarkshire or Selkirkshire or some other county. Indeed, it was not until the whole household was thrown into commotion by a morning call from Mr. Douglas, who asked for Mr. Mountford, and boldly demanded from him the hand of Anne, that it burst upon them that he was a Douglas of nowhere at all. He had been very well educated, and he was at the bar ; but when he was asked what branch of the Douglasses he belonged to, he answered ‘None,’ with a smile. ‘I have no relations,’ he said. Relations can be dispensed with. There is no harm in being without them ; but a family was indispensable, and he belonged to nobody. It was just like Anne, however, not to care. She did not in the least care, nor did she see any harm in her lover’s countyless condition. And when Mr. Mountford politely declined the honour of an alliance with this Mr. Douglas of nowhere at all, she did not hesitate to say that she entirely dis-

agreed with her father. This was the state in which things were at the time of the interview I have recorded. Mr. Mountford was determined, and so was his daughter. This struggle of wills had taken place before, but never before had it gone so far. In former cases Anne had given in, or she had been given in to, the one as much as the other. But now there was no yielding on one side or the other. The father had declared himself inexorable ; the daughter had said little, but her countenance had said much. And the threat with which he wound up had introduced an entirely new element into the discussion. What was to come of it ? But that was what at this moment nobody could venture to say.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE REST OF THE FAMILY.

THE old house of Mount was a commodious but ugly house. It was not even so old as it ought to have been. Only in one corner were there any picturesque remains of antiquity, and that was in the back of the house, and did not show. The only thing in its favour was that it had once been a much larger place than it was now, and a detached bit of lime avenue—very fine trees, forming in the summer two lovely walls of tender shade—was supposed in the traditions of the place to indicate where once the chief entrance and the best part of the mansion had been. At the foot of the terrace on which these trees stood, and at a considerably lower altitude, was the flower-garden, very formally laid out, and lying along the side of the house, which

was of dull brick with very flat windows, and might almost have been a factory, so uninteresting was it; but the lawns that spread around were green and smooth as velvet, and the park, though not large, was full of fine trees. Mr. Mountford's room was in the back of the house, and Anne had to go from one end to another to reach the common morning-room of the family, which was the hall. This had been nothing but a mere passage in former days, though it was square and not badly proportioned; but the modern taste for antiquity had worked a great change in this once commonplace vestibule. It had been furnished with those remains which are always to be found about an old house, relics of past generations, curtains which had been rejected as too dingy for wear a hundred years ago, but now were found to be the perfection of tone and taste—old folding screens, and chairs and tables dismissed as too clumsy or too old-fashioned for the sitting rooms of the family. All these together made a room which strangers called picturesque, but which old neighbours regarded with contempt, as a thing of shreds

and patches. There was but one huge window reaching from the ceiling almost to the floor, and an equally large mantelpiece almost matching the window and opposite to it. The large round table before the fire was covered with an old Indian shawl carefully darned and mended for this use—a use which had revolted all the old ladies in the county—and with books, magazines, and newspapers, carefully arranged by old Saymore, the butler, in a kind of pattern ; for Saymore followed his young ladies, and took a great interest in everything that was artistic. A work-table in one corner overflowed with crewels ; in another stood an easel. The place was full of the occupations and fancies of the two girls who had fashioned it into its present shape. While Anne was having the conversation with her father which has been recorded, Mrs. Mountford and Rose were pursuing their different employments in this room. Mrs. Mountford was a contradiction to everything about her. She wore ribbons of the most pronounced brightness, dresses of the old gay colours ; and did worsted work. She was a round plump woman,

with rosy cheeks and a smiling mouth ; but she was not quite so innocent and easy as her looks indicated. She could stand very fast indeed where any point of interest was concerned—and she was doubly immovable in consequence of the fact that her interests were not her own but those of Rose, and therefore she could not be made to feel guilty in respect to them. She had a little table of her own in the midst of all the properties—which she called rubbish—accumulated by the girls, and there pursued her placid way week after week and year after year, working, as if she had been born a century earlier, groups of roses and geraniums for cushions and footstools, and strips of many coloured work for curtains and rugs. Had she been permitted to have her will, the house would have been furnished with these from garret to basement ; but as Rose was ‘artistic,’ poor Mrs. Mountford’s Berlin wools were rarely made any use of. They were given away as presents, and disposed of at bazaars. There was a closet in her own room which was full of them, and a happy woman was she when any girl of her ac-

quaintance married, or a fancy fair was announced for any charitable object, which reduced her stores. A workbasket full of the most brilliant wools in the tidiest bundles, a German pattern printed in squares, a little pile of tradesmen's books in red covers, and a small brown basket full of keys, were the signs of her little settlement in the hall. These possessions stood upon a small table with three legs, decorated with a broad band of Mrs. Mountford's work. She had said boldly that if she were not permitted to put her own work upon her own table, she did not know what the world would come to. And upon hearing this protest Anne had interfered. Anne was the only person who ever interfered to save her stepmother from the tyranny exercised over her by her own child; but Mrs. Mountford was not grateful enough to return this service by taking Anne's part.

Rose was the presiding spirit of the hall. Though she did not originate anything, but followed her sister's lead, yet she carried out all the suggestions that ever glanced across the surface of Anne's mind

with an energy which often ended in making the elder sister somewhat ashamed of her initiative. Anne's fancies become stereotyped in Rose's execution, and nothing but a new idea from the elder changed the current of the younger girl's enthusiasm. When Anne took to ornamental design, Rose painted all the panels of the doors and window shutters, and even had begun a pattern of sunflowers round the drawing-room (which had been newly decorated with a dado and three kinds of wall-papers), when Anne fortunately took to sketching from nature, and saved the walls by directing her sister's thoughts in another direction. The easel remained a substantial proof of these studies, but a new impulse had changed the aspect of affairs. In the course of the sketching it had been discovered that some of the cottages on the estate were in the most wretched condition, and Anne, with the instinct of a budding squire and philanthropist united, had set to work upon plans for new houses. The consequence of which was that Rose, with compasses and rulers and a box of freshly-cut pencils, was deep in the question of sculleries

and wash-houses, marking all the measurements upon the plan, with her whole heart in the work.

‘Anne is a long time with papa,’ said Mrs. Mountford; ‘I suppose she is trying to talk him over; she might just as well try to move the house. You girls never will understand that it is of no use arguing with papa.’

‘One never can help thinking that reason must prevail,’ said Rose, without raising her head, ‘at the end.’

‘Reason !’ said Mrs. Mountford, lifting her hands and her eyebrows; ‘but, even if it were always reason, what would that matter? As for Anne, she has a great deal too much self-confidence; she always thinks she is right.’

‘And so she is—almost always,’ said Rose, very busy with her measuring. ‘Do you happen to remember, mamma, whether it is ninety feet or a hundred that the pigsty must be off the house?’

‘What should I know about pigsties? I am sure I often wonder papa takes all the trouble he does when you are both so headstrong. Fortunately

for him he has me to talk to where *you* are concerned ; but Anne !——oh, here she is—don't say anything, she may not like to have it talked about. So here you are at last, Anne ; we thought you were never coming. But I wish I had someone to do my work for me when I am busy about something else, as Rose does for you. She never takes so much trouble on my account.'

'It is not her work,' said Rose, offended, 'it is my own. Mayn't I have something now and then that is my own ? How many yards, Anne, do you remember, must the pigsty be off the house ?'

Anne did not remember this important piece of knowledge. 'But,' she said, 'it is in that book of specifications. It is dry to read, but it is a very good book ; you should have it on the table to refer to. You have made the living room too large in comparison with the rest of the house.'

'Because they are poor,' said Rose, indignantly, 'is that to say that they are to have nothing pretty in their lives ?'

'But there must be a good scullery,' said Anne.

She stood with a very grave face behind her sister, looking over her shoulder at the drawings spread out on the table. Whether it was the importance of the scullery, or of the other matters concerning her own happiness which she had in her head, it is certain that Anne's countenance was very serious. The very tone of her voice proved to those who knew her so well that her mood was graver than usual. At other times the importance of the scullery would have brought a tone of laughter, an accent of fun into her voice; but her gravity was now quite real and unbroken by any lighter sentiment. She was taller than her sister, and of a different order altogether. Anne was rather pale than otherwise, with but a slight evanescent colour now and then; her features good, her face oval, her eyes dark grey, large and lucid, and with long eyelashes curling upwards. But Rose, though she had all that *beauté de diable* which is the privilege of youth, was, like her mother, round and rosy, though her pretty little face and figure had not the solidity, nor her complexion the set and rigid tone which placid middle age acquires. The

one face over the other contrasted pleasantly ; the elder serious, as if nothing in heaven or earth could ever make her smile again ; the younger bent with momentary gravity and importance over her work. But they had no air of belonging to each other. Nothing but an accident could have linked together two beings so little resembling. The accident was Mr. Mountford, whom neither of them was at all like. They were not Mountfords at all, as everybody in the neighbourhood allowed. They took after their mothers, not the one and indivisible head of the family ; but that did not really matter, for these two girls, like their mothers, were no more than accidents in the house.

The ancient estate was entailed, and knew nothing of such slight things as girls. When their father died they would have to give up Mount and go away from it. It was true that there still would be a great deal of land in the county belonging to one of them at least, for Mr. Mountford had not been able to resist the temptation of buying and enlarging his estate at the time when he married his

first wife, and thought of no such misfortune as that of leaving only a couple of girls behind him. A long life and boys to succeed him were as certainties in his thoughts when he bought all the lands about Charwood and the estate of Lower Lilford. There they lay now, embracing Mount on every side, Mount which must go to Heathcote Mountford, the head of the *other* family. It was grievous, but it could not be helped. And the girls were not Mountfords, either the one or the other. They betrayed, shall we say, an inherent resentment against the law of entail and all its harsh consequences, by resembling their mothers, and declining to be like the race which thus callously cast them forth.

Mrs. Mountford looked at them with very watchful eyes. She knew what it was which had made her husband send for his eldest daughter into his study after breakfast. It was a circumstance which often galled Anne, a high-spirited girl, that her stepmother should be in the secret of all her personal concerns ; but still man and wife are one, and it could not be helped. This fact, however, that everything was

known about her, whether she would or not, shut her lips and her heart. Why should she be confidential and open herself to their inspection when they knew it all beforehand without her? This stopped all inclination to confide, and had its effect, no doubt, as all repression has, on Anne's character. Her heart was in a turmoil now, aching with anger and annoyance, and disappointment, and a sense of wrong. But the only effect of this was to make her more serious than ever. In such a mood to win a smile from her, to strike her sense of humour, which was lively, or to touch her heart, which was tender, was to open the floodgates, and the girl resented and avoided this risk with all the force of her nature. And, truth to tell, there was little power, either in Mrs. Mountford or her daughter, to undo the bonds with which Anne had bound herself. It was seldom that they appealed to her feelings, and when they made her laugh it was not in sympathy, but derision—an unamiable and unsatisfactory kind of laughter. Therefore it happened now that they knew she was in trouble, and watched her keenly to see the traces of it; and

she knew they knew, and sternly repressed any symptom by which they might divine how much moved she was.

‘ You build your cottages your way,’ cried Rose, ‘ and I will build mine in mine. Papa will let me have my choice as well as you, and just see which will be liked best.

‘ If Heathcote should have to be consulted,’ said Anne, ‘ it will be the cheapest that he will like best.

‘ Anne! I shouldn’t have thought that even you could be so unfeeling. To remind us that dear papa—’ cried Mrs. Mountford; ‘ dear papa! Do not speak of his life in that indifferent way, at least before Rose.’

‘ Oh, it would not matter,’ said Rose, calmly, ‘ whatever happens; for they are for the Lilford houses on our very own land. Heathcote hasn’t anything to do with them.’

‘ Anne might say, “Nor you either,” my Rosie,’ said her mother; ‘ for everybody knows that you are cut off out of it in every way. Oh, I don’t find any

fault. I knew it when I married, and you have known it all your life. It is rather hard, however, everything turning out against us, you and me, my pet ; part of the property going away altogether to a distant cousin, and the rest all tied up because one of you is to be made an eldest son.'

'Mamma!' said Rose, petulantly, giving a quick glance up at her mother, and shrugging her shoulders with the superiority of youth, as who would say, Why speak of things you don't understand? Then she closed her compasses and put down her pencil. 'Are we to have a game this afternoon?' she said; 'I mean, Anne, are you going to play? Charley and Willie are sure to come, but if you go off as usual, it will be no good, for three can't play.'

The colour came in a flood over Anne's pale face. 'Mamma plays better than I do,' she said. 'I have a headache. I don't think I shall do anything this afternoon.'

'Will Mr. Douglas have a headache too?' said Rose; 'he generally has when you have. It is not

much fun,' she added, with a little virtuous indignation, 'for Charley and Willie to play with mamma.'

Mrs. Mountford showed no resentment at this frank speech. 'No,' she said, 'it is not much fun for Charley and Willie. I don't think it has been much fun for them since Mr. Douglas came. Anne likes his talk; he is a very fine talker. It is more interesting to listen to him than to play.'

'Sometimes it is,' said Anne gravely, though with another blush; and then the two others laughed.

'My dear, you bring it on yourself; if we are not to have your confidence, we must have our laugh. We have eyes in our head as well as other people—or, at least, I have eyes in my head,' said the mother. Anne could not but acknowledge that there was reason in what she said, but it was not said in a way to soften the wounded and angry girl.

'I do not ask you not to laugh,' she said.

'You look more like crying,' said Rose; and she got up and threw her arms suddenly about her sister being an impulsive little person whose sympathies

were not to be calculated upon. ‘What is it, dear? tell me,’ she cried, with her soft lips upon her sister’s cheek.

Anne’s heart swelled as if it would burst out of her breast. There are states of mind in which everything can be borne but sympathy. The gates so hastily rolled to and pushed close began to open. The tears came to her eyes. But then she remembered that the threat her father had made was not one to be confided to them.

‘Never mind. I have been talking to my father, and he and I don’t see things in the same light. We don’t always—one can’t help that,’ said Anne, in a subdued voice.

‘Come up to my room,’ said Rose in her ear. ‘Never mind mamma—oh, come up to my room, Anne darling, and tell me all about it! I never was anyone’s confidant before.’

But this was not a process which Anne, shy with a fervour of feeling more profound than Rose could understand, or she herself express, felt at all disposed to go through. She put her younger sister gently

aside, and brought her plans too to the table. ‘We had better settle about the pigsties,’ she said, with a little relaxation of her gravity. She laughed in spite of herself. ‘It is a safe subject. Show me, Rosie, what you have done.’

Rose was still fresh to this pursuit, and easily recalled to it, so she produced her drawings with little hesitation, and after a while forgot the more interesting matter. They sat with their heads together over the plans, while Mrs. Mountford pursued her worsted work. A moralist might have found in the innocent-seeming group all that inscrutableness of human nature which it is so easy to remark and so impossible to fathom. Rose, it was true, had not much in her little mind except the cottages, and the hope of producing a plan which should be approved as the best, having in her heart a childish desire to surpass Anne, which by no means diminished her faithful allegiance to her as the origin of all impulses and setter of every fashion. But Anne’s heart, underneath the fresh crispness of her muslin dress, and the apparent interest with

which she pursued her work, and discussed her sculleries, was beating high with much confused and painful emotion. Indignation and a sense of wrong, mingled with a certain contempt even for the threat which had wounded her as an empty menace, never to be carried out—a false and fictitious weapon meant for no end but that of giving her pain ; and, on the other hand, the disappointment of her hopes, and a certainty of severance from the love which had been a revelation to her of so much in heaven and earth of which she was unaware before—filled her being. She would not give him up, but she would be parted from him. He would go away, and any intercourse they might hereafter keep up must be maintained in resistance to the authority under which she had lived all her life. Thus what she had supposed to be the crown and glory of existence was summarily turned into bitterness and wrong. She was turning it over and over in her mind, while she sat there steadily comparing her measurements with those of her sister, and wondering how long she must go on with this in order to confound her stepmother's

suspicions, and prove that she was neither discouraged nor rendered unhappy by what had happened. Naturally, in her inexperience, Anne gave great importance to this feat of baffling her stepmother's observation, and looking 'just as usual ;' and naturally, also, she failed altogether in the attempt. Mrs. Mountford was an experienced woman. She knew what it meant when a girl looked too much as if nothing had happened. And she watched with great vigilance, partly by simple instinct, partly with a slight sense of gratification, that the elder daughter, who was so much more important than her own child, should feel that she was mortal. It was not any active malevolence that was in Mrs. Mountford's mind. She would have been horrified had it been suggested to her that she wished Anne any harm. She wished her no harm ; but only that she might feel after all that life was not one triumph and scene of unruffled success and blessedness—which is the best moral discipline for everybody, as is well known.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE 'GAME.'

THE name of the parish in which Mount was the principal house was Moniton, by some supposed to be a corruption of Mount-ton, the village being situated on the side of a circular hill looking more like a military mound than a natural object, which gave the name alike to the property and the district. Mount Hill, as it was called with unnecessary amplification, was just outside the park gates, and at its foot lay the Rectory, the nearest neighbouring house with which the Mountfords could exchange civilities. When one comes to think of it, the very existence of such ecclesiastical houses close by the mansions of the English gentry and nobility is a standing menace and danger to that nobler and more elevated class—now that the family living is

no longer a natural provision for a younger son. The greatest grandee in the land has to receive the clergyman's family as equals, whatever may be his private opinion on the subject ; they are ladies and gentlemen, however poor they may be, or little eligible to be introduced into closer connection with members of the aristocracy, titled or otherwise ; and, as a matter of fact, they have to be so received, whence great trouble sometimes arises, as everybody knows. The young people at the Hall and the parsonage grow up together, they meet continually, and join in all each other's amusements, and if they determine to spend their lives together afterwards, notwithstanding all those social differences which are politely ignored in society, until the moment comes when they must be brought into prominence, who can wonder at it ? The wonder is that on the whole so little harm occurs. The young Ashleys were the nearest neighbours of the Mountford girls. They called each other by their Christian names ; they furnished each other with most of their amusements. Had the boys not been ready to their call

for any scheme of pleasure or use, the girls would have felt themselves aggrieved. But if Charley or Willie had fallen in love with Anne or Rose, the whole social economy would have been shaken by it, and no earthquake would have made a greater commotion. Such catastrophes are constantly happening to the confusion of one district after another all over the country ; but who can do anything to prevent it ? That it had not happened (openly) in the present case was due to no exceptional philosophy or precaution on any side. And the chance which had made Mr. Cosmo Douglas speak first instead of his friend, the curate, was in no way a fortunate one, except in so far, indeed, that, though it produced great pain and sorrow, it, at least, preserved peace between the two families. The Rector was as much offended, as indignant as Mr. Mountford could be, at the audacity of his son's friend. A stranger, a chance visitor, an intruder in the parish, he, at least, had no vested rights.

The facts of the case were as yet, however, but imperfectly known. Douglas had not gone away,

though it was known that his interview with Mr. Mountford had not been a successful one; but that was no reason why the Ashleys should not stroll up to Mount on this summer afternoon, as was their very general practice. There was always some business to talk about—something about the schools, or the savings bank, or other parochial affairs; and both of them were well aware that without them 'a game' was all but impossible.

'Do you feel up to it, old fellow?' Willie said to Charley, who was the curate. The elder brother did not make any distinct reply. He said, 'There's Douglas to be thought of,' with a somewhat lugubrious glance behind him where that conquering hero lay on the grass idly puffing his cigar.

'Confound Douglas!' said the younger brother, who was a secular person and free to speak his mind. Charley Ashley replied only with a stifled sigh. He might not himself have had the courage to lay his curacy and his hopes at Anne's feet, at least for a long time to come, but it was not to be expected that he could look with pleasure on the man who

had rushed in where he feared to tread, his supplanter, the Jacob who had pushed him out of his path. But yet he could not help in a certain sense admiring his friend's valour. He could not help talking of it as they took their way more slowly than usual across the park, when Douglas, with a conscious laugh, which went sharply, like a needle, through the poor curate's heart, declined to join them, but begged they 'would not mind' leaving him behind.

'When a fellow has the pluck to do it, things generally go well with him,' Charley said.

The two brothers were very good friends. The subject of Anne was one which had never been discussed between them, but Willie Ashley knew by instinct what were his brother's sentiments, and Charley was conscious that he knew. The little roughness with which the one thrust his arm into the other's spoke of itself a whole volume of sympathy, and they walked through the sunshine and under the flickering shadows of the trees, slowly and heavily, the curate with his head bent, and his

brown beard, of which he was as proud as was becoming to a young clergyman, lying on his breast.

'Pluck carries everything before it,' he said, with a sigh. 'I never was one of your plucky ones.'

'If you call that pluck!' cried the other, 'when a fellow thinks of nothing but himself, and goes straight before him, whatever happens.'

'The curate pressed his brother's arm with tacit thanks, but he sighed even more. 'All the same it was a plucky thing to do,' he said.

The young men were seen approaching for a long time before they reached the house. 'I wonder what has happened,' said Rose; 'they walk as if they were going to a funeral; but I suppose I had better go and see that everything is ready for the game.' After all this was the important matter, and the Ashleys, though of no great consequence in themselves, were at least the only young men in the parish; and if the Woodheads came, as Rose expected, it looked a poor sort of thing to have no men. What the game was I can scarcely pretend

to say. It might be croquet, or it might be lawn tennis. This is entirely a chronological question, and one upon which, as the date of this commencement is a little vague, I cannot take upon me to decide. And just as Willie and Charley approached slowly, in a solemn march, the familiar house to which they had so often turned with steps and hearts less weighted, the Woodheads appeared on the other side.

'I was sure they would come,' cried Rose; 'here are Gerty and Fanny.' These young ladies were a clergyman's daughters, and might have paired off most suitably with the Ashleys and no harm done; but perverse humanity may be so far trusted as to make sure that none of the four thought of any such sensible arrangement.

As for Anne, a sigh of satisfaction and relief came from her bosom, not like that deeper sigh which breathed forth the curate's cares. As soon as she had seen the game begun and all comfortable, she would escape to her own business. Her heart beat high with the thought of the meeting that awaited

her, and of the long, confiding, lover's talk, the pouring out of all her cares into another heart which was her own. Anne had not been accustomed to much sympathy in her life. She had not wanted it perhaps. She loved her little sister with her whole heart ; but a high sense of honour had kept her, even when a child, from confiding to Rose any of the little jars and frets of which Rose's mother was the chief cause ; and what other cares had Anne ? So that the delight of saying everything that was in her heart was as new to her as the love that made it possible. And it was one of the elements of wondering happiness that filled her whole being to find out how many things she had to tell. She had thought herself reserved, unexpansive, sometimes even cold and heartless, when she beheld the endless confidential chatter of other girls, and wondered why it was that she had nothing to confide. But now she was half dismayed and half transported to discover how much she too had to say. The deep waters of her heart seemed to flow over from that secret place, and pour out in an irrestrainable flood.

It seemed to herself that she kept them in with difficulty even to other people *now*. She had so much to tell him that she could scarcely help preluding even to those who were indifferent, betraying to them the great tide of utterance that was in her. As a matter of fact, she did not at all betray herself; the Woodheads and the Ashleys saw that Anne was slightly flushed and feverish, justifying the complaint she made of a headache, for the sake of which she feared staying out in the sun; and one of the former, who was a medical young lady, accustomed to manage all the lighter maladies of her father's parish, immediately prescribed for the sufferer.

'Don't stay out here,' Miss Fanny said; 'it is the worst thing possible. Go and lie down; or, if you don't like that, sit down in the shade and take a quiet book. Have you got a novel?—if it's not an exciting one, that will do—but keep yourself perfectly quiet and never mind us. Her pulse is just a little excited—nothing to be alarmed about—if she will but go and lie down.'

The others, especially the two young men, ex-

changed furtive glances. Willie pressed Charley's arm with a whisper, 'Keep it up, old fellow!' Poor curate! he looked piteously at the girl whom he had not had the courage to try for. Would her cheeks have taken that lovely flush, her eye got that anxious, nervous brightness for him? Was it all a question of pluck, and who should be the first to speak? He watched her going back to the house, across the flower garden, with his lips in an unconscious foolish gape of self-renunciation and tender pity and regret. But happily that rich brown beard of his hid the imbecility of this pathetic simple gaze. And then he turned with sober resolution to the game. He cared for nothing any more now that Anne had gone. But an Englishman must play his game out whatever happens; though heaven and earth should melt away.

Nobody suspected her, nobody dreamt what Anne was about to do. That she should do anything that was not open and manifest entered into no one's idea of her. She had always been mistress of herself and all her ways, and had never quailed

before the face of man. Did she feel guilty now when she thus appeared to accept the advice offered to her—appeared to consent to take shelter from the sun, and went back to the house to lie down, or take a quiet book, as was recommended? Anne was a great deal too much occupied with her own thoughts and plans to feel any of those little guilts yet. She was scarcely conscious of what she herself felt and thought. She had to carry the report of the morning to the other person, who was as much concerned as she was in it; to tell him everything, to know what he had to say, to consult with him as to what they were to do. With all this in her heart, a flood of thought, rising and falling, like waves of the sea, is it possible that she could think of what the others would say, or even of the novel aspect of her subterfuge and evasion? She could think of nothing about them, but of how to get free, to be delivered from her companions. To see him was necessary, indispensable. She had never permitted it to be supposed that she would not see him, or suffered anything to be drawn from her which could imply

an intention of giving him up. Her father had said nothing on this subject. There had been neither condition nor promise. But still it was no doubt contrary to Anne's character, as it was to high honour and sincerity, that she should allow it to be supposed that she was returning to the house on account of her headache, when her intention was to go out another way and meet her lover. When she thought of it afterwards the flush of shame which came over her ran from head to foot; but at the present moment she was entirely unmoved by it. The idea did not so much as cross the threshold of her mind.

She went softly into the cool and silent house. There was nobody visible in the long passages, nor in the hall through which she passed, not consciously going with any precaution, yet making little sound with her light foot. Even Mr. Mountford was out; the doors stood open, the sunshine streamed in here and there at a window making a bar of blazing whiteness across the corridor or stair. Old Saymore was in the open vestibule, full of plants and

flowers, into which the great door opened. He was standing before a tall vase of white glass, almost as high as himself, in which he was arranging with great anxiety and interest a waving bouquet of tall ferns and feathery branches. Old Saymore had a soul for art, and the fancies of his young mistress stood in place of all the canons and science of beauty to his mind. He stood with his head on one side, now and then walking a few steps backward to consider the combination of his leaves like an artist before a picture, pulling one forward, pushing one back, pondering with the gravest countenance how to prop up in the middle the waving plume of sumach with which he intended to crown the edifice. He was too much absorbed in his performance to notice Anne, who for her part was too completely preoccupied by hers to see him where he stood, embowered in all that greenery, calculating and considering with the most serious countenance as if the weight of an empire was on his shoulders. As she ran down the steps he heard her for the first time, and turned round hurriedly, moved by the hope of

finding a critic and adviser. But his cry of 'Miss Anne!' failed to reach her ear. Her heart was beating high, her thoughts rushing at such a rapid rate that they made a little atmosphere of sound about her, and shut out all less ethereal appeals.

After the Ashleys had left the Rectory, Mr. Cosmo Douglas for his part raised himself from the grass where he had lain so luxuriously puffing his cigar. He was more amused than distressed by the confusion he had brought among them. Charley Ashley was his friend, but the affection had been chiefly on one side. It had been, as the other very well knew, a distinction for Ashley, who was not distinguished in any other way, to be known as the friend of a personage so much more brilliant and popular than himself. Douglas had been accustomed to smile when he was asked by his admirers 'what he could see' in the good fellow who was neither clever nor gay, nor rich, nor witty, and who had, indeed, no particular recommendation except his goodness. It pleased him to attach to himself this useful, faithful, humble friend, who was always

ready to stand up for him, and never likely to bring him into any scrape or trouble. And he had always been ready, he thought, to do anything for Charley — to coach him for an examination, to write an essay for him, to ‘pull him through’ any of the crises of a college career. But to go so far as to curb his own fancy for a girl who pleased him because Charley had set his affections in the same quarter, was a thing entirely beyond Cosmo’s perceptions of the duties of friendship. And when he saw the dismal looks of his friend—his heavy dropping back upon the sympathy of Willie, his younger brother, who had never hitherto been his confidant, and the suppressed indignation towards himself of that younger and always jealous companion, he was more tickled than grieved by it. The idea that he could find a serious rival in Ashley never entered his thoughts—or, indeed, that anyone should pay the slightest regard to poor Charley while he was by. Douglas had, indeed, so much confidence in the humility of his friend that he felt his own preference of any thing or person to be a quite sufficient reason

why Charley should give it up. 'He likes to give in to me,' was what he had said on many previous occasions; and he was unable to understand how any other affection could be more deeply rooted in Ashley's bosom than that which was directed to himself. Therefore he only smiled at what he supposed a momentary petulance. Good simple soul. perhaps Douglas respected his friend more than he was capable of being so badly 'hit.' But yet he could scarcely realise the possibility of it. Charley in love had not presented itself to him as a credible idea. It made him laugh in spite of himself. And as for interfering with Charley!—as if anyone could suppose it possible that Charley was a man to catch a lady's eye.

Cosmo's first visit had been at Christmas, when all was new to him, and when the revelation of the two girls at Mount, so full of life and movement amid the gentle stagnation of the parish, had been the most delightful surprise to the resigned visitor, who had come as a matter of duty, determined to endure anything, and make himself agreeable to

Charley's friends. ' You never told me what sort of neighbours you had,' he had said almost with indignation. ' Neighbours! I told you about the Mountfords and the Woodheads, and Lord Meadowlands, who is our great gun,' said Charley tranquilly. ' You speak as if they were all the same—Mountfords and Woodheads and Smiths and Jones—whereas Miss Mountford would be remarked in any society,' Douglas had said. He remembered afterwards that Charley had looked at him for a moment before he replied, and had grown red ; but all he had said was, ' I didn't know that you thought much about girls.' All this passed through Douglas's mind as he stood looking after the two brothers, watching the mournfulness of their march with an irrepressible sense of the ludicrous. To see that victim of fate leaning on his brother's arm, dropping now and then a melancholy word or deep-heaved sigh, and walking gloomily, as after a funeral, to the afternoon ' game,' was a sight at which the most sympathetic looker-on might have been excused for smiling. ' I didn't know that you thought much about girls!' Was

there ever a more stupid remark? And how was I to know *he* thought much about girls? Douglas asked himself with another laugh. His conscience was easily satisfied on this point. And he had come down at the beginning of the long vacation to see a little more of the Ashleys' neighbours. He could not but feel that it must be a relief to them also to see a conversible being, an alive and awake human creature amidst those scenes of rural life.

But now how far things had gone! Douglas had been a month at the Rectory, and as his eyes followed the two Ashleys along the white sun-swept road and away under the shadow of the park trees, the idea came to him, with a curious sense of expansive and enlarged being, that the masses of foliage sweeping away towards the west, amid which the two solemn wayfarers soon disappeared, would one day, in all probability, be his own. 'No, by the bye, not that; that's the entailed part,' he said to himself; then laughed again, this time partly in gentle self-ridicule, partly in pleasure, and turned his face the other way, towards Lower Lilford—for he had made himself

master of the whole particulars. Facing this way, and with the laugh still on his lips, he suddenly found himself in the presence of the Rector, who had come out by his own study window at the sight of the solitary figure on the lawn. Douglas felt himself taken in the act--though of what it would have been hard to say. He grew red in spite of himself under the gaze of the Rector's mild and dull eyes.

'Have the boys left you alone? I can't think how they could be so rude,' Mr. Ashley said.

'Not rude at all, sir. It is I who am rude. I was lazy, and promised to follow them when I had finished my—novel.' Happily, he recollect ed in time that he had been holding one in his hand. 'I am going now,' he added. 'I dare say I shall catch them up before they get to the house.'

'I was afraid they were leaving you to take care of yourself—that is not our old-fashioned way,' said the old clergyman. 'I wish you a pleasant walk. It is a fine afternoon, but you will find the road dusty. I advise you to go over the meadows and round the lower way.'

'That is just how I intended to go.'

'Very sensible. The boys always take the high road. The other takes you round by the Beeches, much the prettiest way ; but it is longer round, and that is why they never use it. A pleasant walk to you,' Mr. Ashley said, waving his hand as he went back to the house.

Douglas laughed to himself as he took the path through the meadows which Mr. Ashley had indicated. The Rector had not as yet interested himself much in what was going on, and the simplicity with which he had suggested the way which the lovers had chosen, and which led to their trysting-place, amused the intruder still more. 'If he but knew!' Douglas said to himself, transferring to the old clergyman the thoughts that filled the mind of his son, by a very natural heightening of his own importance. And yet, to tell the truth, had Mr. Ashley known, it would have been a great relief to his mind, as releasing Charley from a great danger and the parish from a possible convulsion. To know this, however, might have lessened the extreme satisfac-

tion with which Douglas set out for the meeting. He went slowly on across the green fields, all bright in the sunshine, across the little stream, and up the leafy woodland road that led to the Beeches, his heart pleasantly agitated, his mind full of delightful anticipations. Anne herself was sweet to him, and his conquest of her flattered him in every particular. Happiness, importance, wealth, an established place in the world, were all coming to him, linked hand in hand with the loves and joys which surrounded the girl's own image. He had no fear of the consequences. Remorseless fathers were not of his time. Such mediæval furniture had been cleared out of the world. He expected nothing from this meeting but acceptance, reconciliation, love, and happiness.

## CHAPTER IV.

## UNDER THE BEECHES.

THE Beeches were a beautiful clump of trees on a knoll in the middle of the park. They were renowned through the county, and one of the glories of Mount. When the family was absent—which did not happen often—picnic parties were made up to visit them. There was nothing like them in all the country round. The soil was rich and heavy round them with the shedding of their own leaves, and when the sun got in through their big branches and touched that brown carpet it shone like specks of gold. Some of the branches were like trees in themselves, and the great grey trunks like towers. One of them had been called, from time immemorial, the lover's tree. It was scrawled over with initials, some of them half a century old, or more. From

the elevation on which they stood the spectator looked down upon the house lying below among its gardens, on the green terrace and the limes, and could watch what the group there was doing, while himself safe from all observation. When Douglas had informed Anne of her father's rejection of his suit, she had bidden him come to this spot to hear the issue of her own interview with Mr. Mountford. He seated himself tranquilly enough under the lover's tree to await her coming. He was not too much agitated to smoke his cigar. Indeed, he was not much agitated at all. He had no fear for the eventual issue. True, it might not come immediately. He did not know that he wanted it to come immediately. To love is one thing, to marry another. So long as he was sure of Anne, he did not mind waiting for a year or two. And he felt that he was sure of Anne, and in that case, eventually, of her father too. Consequently, he sat still and waited, pleased, in spite of himself, with the little lawlessness. To be received in the ordinary way as a son-in-law, to kiss the ladies of the house, and

shake hands with the men, and be told in a trembling voice that it was the choicest treasure of the family that was being bestowed upon him, were all things which a man of courage has to go through, and does go through without flinching. But on the whole it was more delightful to have Anne steal away to him out of all commonplace surroundings and make him sure of her supreme and unfailing love, whatever anyone might say—with, *bien entendu*, the paternal blessing in the background, to be won after a little patience. Douglas was flattered in all his wishes and fancies by this romantic beginning. He would have the good, he thought, both of the old system of love-making and the new—Anne by herself, without any drawbacks, willing to dare any penalties for his sake ; but at the end everything that was legitimate and proper—settlements and civilities. He liked it better so than if it had been necessary to wind up everything in a few months, and marry and be settled ; indeed it pleased him much, being so sure as he was of all that was to follow, to have this little secret and clandestine intercourse. He liked it.

To get Anne to do so much as this for him was a triumph; his vanity overflowed while he sat and waited for her, though vanity was but a small part of his character. He reached that spot so soon that he saw the beginning of the ‘game,’ and Anne’s white figure going back through the flower garden all blazing with colour, to the house. What excuse had she been able to find for leaving them? She must have invented some excuse. And he saw the curate settling himself to that ‘game,’ with unspeakable amusement. He took his cigar from between his lips to laugh. Poor old Charley! his heart was broken, but he did his duty like a man. He watched him settling to his afternoon’s work with Gertrude Woodhead as his partner, and laughed, feeling the full humour of the event, and enjoying the tremendous seriousness with which that sacrifice to duty was made. Then, while the game went on in the bright foreground of the picture, he saw the moving speck of that white figure re-issuing on the other side of the house, and advancing towards him, threading her way among the trees. It was for him

that Anne did this, and he it was alone of all concerned who could sit here calmly puffing the blue smoke among the branches, and waiting for his happiness to come to him. Never was man more elated, more flattered, more perfectly contented with himself.

He threw the cigar away when she was within a short distance of the spot, and went to meet her with triumphant pleasure.

' My faithful Anne—my true love,' he said as he met her. And Anne came to him ; her eyes shining, her lips apart with eagerness. What a meeting it was ! No tame domestic reception and hubbub of family excitement could compare with it. How glad and flattered he felt that it was a clandestine indulgence, and that papa had not vulgarised everything by giving his consent ! Then they sat down upon the knoll, arm linked in arm, and clasping each other's hands. There was the peaceful house within sight, and the party on the green terrace absorbed in their inferior amusement, in complete ignorance, not knowing what romance was going on, scarcely

out of their range of vision, under the trees. All these experiences served to enhance the delight of his position. For the first few minutes he attached less importance to the words which Anne said.

‘But you do not seem to understand me. My father will not consent.’

‘If *you* consent, my darling, what do I want more? I am not afraid of your father.’

‘But Cosmo—listen! you are not really paying any attention——’

‘Every attention, to the real matter in question. I am reading that in your eyes, in your hands, in you altogether. If I am too happy to take any notice of those vulgarer symbols, words——’

‘But they are not vulgar symbols. Yes, I am happy too. I am not afraid of anything. But, Cosmo, you must listen, and you must understand. My father refuses his consent.’

‘For how long?’ he said with a smile. ‘I also should like to refuse you something for the pleasure of being persuaded to forswear myself. I think papa

is right. I should hold out as long as you would put any faith in the delusion of my resistance.'

'It is no delusion,' said Anne, shaking her head. 'You must not think so. It is very serious. He has threatened me. There was no make-believe in his mind, Cosmo.'

'Threatened you? With what? Ah! so should I if I thought you were going to desert me.'

'You will not see how serious it is! I do not believe he will give in, Cosmo. He has threatened me that if I persevere he will leave everything he has to leave, away from me.'

'Away from you? But he has no power to do that,' said the young man. 'It is skilful of him to try your faithfulness—but he might have tried it by less conventional means.'

'Yes, he has the power,' said Anne, neglecting the other part of this speech. 'He has power over everything, except, indeed, the entail; and I believe he will do what he says. My father is not a man at all likely to try my faithfulness. He knows me, for one thing.'

‘And knows you true as steel,’ said Cosmo, looking admiringly in her face and still quite unimpressed by the news.

‘Knows that I am not one to give way. He knows that very well. So here is something for your serious consideration. No, indeed, it is no joke. You must not laugh. We must face what is before us,’ said Anne, endeavouring to withdraw her hand and half offended by his unbelief.

‘I cannot face your frown,’ said Cosmo, ‘that is the only thing I am really afraid of. What! must it really be so stern as this? But these hard fathers, my darling, belong to the fifteenth century. You don’t mean to tell me that rebellious daughters are—shut up in their rooms, and oaths insisted upon, and paternal curses uttered *now!*’

‘I said nothing about being shut up in my room; but it is quite certain,’ said Anne, with a little heat, ‘that if I oppose him in this point my father will take all that ought to come to me and give it to Rose.’

‘To Rose!’ a shade of dismay stole over Cosmo’s

face. ‘But I thought,’ he said—showing an acquaintance with the circumstances which after, when she thought of it, surprised Anne—‘I thought your fortune came from your mother, not from Mr. Mountford at all.’

‘And so it does; but it is all in his hands; my mother trusted in my father entirely, as she was of course quite right to do.’

‘As it must have been the height of imprudence to permit her to do!’ cried Douglas, suddenly reddening with anger. ‘How could the trustees be such fools? So you, like the money, are entirely in Mr. Mountford’s hands?’

All at once the tone had ceased to be that of a lovers’ interview. Anne, startled and offended, this time succeeded in drawing her hand out of his.

‘Yes,’ she said, with a chill of surprise in her voice, ‘entirely in his hands.’

What was going to follow? Under the great beechen boughs, through the warm summer sunshine there seemed all at once to breathe a wintry gale which penetrated to the heart.

This sudden cloud was dissipated in a moment by another laugh, which rang almost too loudly among the trees. ‘Well,’ he said, drawing her arm through his again, and holding the reluctant hand clasped fast, ‘what of that? Because you are in his hands, Anne, my own, do you think I am going to let you slip out of mine?’

The sun grew warm again, and the air delicious as before. Two on one side, and all the world on the other, is not that a perfectly fair division? So long as there are two—if there should come to be but one, then the aspect of everything is changed. Anne’s hands clasped between two bigger ones all but disappeared from view. It would be hard, very hard, to slip out of that hold; and it was a minute or two before she regained possession of what Cosmo had called the vulgarer symbols, words. Without recurrence to their aid between people who love each other, how much can be said!

‘That is all very well,’ said Anne, at last; ‘but whatever we may do or say we must come back to this: My father has promised to disin-

herit me, Cosmo, and he will not go back from his word.'

'Disinherit! the very word sounds romantic. Are we in a novel or are we not? I thought disinherit was only a word for the stage.'

'But you know this is mere levity,' said Anne. She smiled in spite of herself. It pleased her to the bottom of her heart that he should take it so lightly, that he should refuse to be frightened by it. 'We are not boy and girl,' she said, with delightful gravity of reproof. 'We *must* think seriously of a thing which affects our interests so much. The question is, what is to be done?'

Had she but known how keenly under his levity he was discussing that question within himself! But he went on, still half laughing as if it were the best joke in the world.

'The only thing, so far as I can see, that is *not* to be done,' he said, 'is to obey papa and give me up.'

'Give up—I would not give up a dog!' cried Anne, impetuously; 'and Cosmo, you!'

‘ I am not a dog ; and yet in one sense, in Mr. Mountford’s eyes—— What is it, Anne, that hedges you round with such divinity, you landed people ? Mountford of Mount : it sounds very well, I confess. And why was I not Douglas of somewhere or other ? It is very hard upon you, but yet it is not my fault.’

‘ I like you infinitely better,’ cried Anne, with proud fervour, ‘ that you are Douglas of nowhere, but stand upon yourself—the father of your own fortunes. That is the thing to be proud of—if one has ever any right to be proud.’

‘ I have not achieved much to be proud of as yet,’ he said, shaking his head ; and then there was again a pause, perhaps not quite so ecstatic a pause, for practical necessity and the urgent call for a decision of one kind or other began to be felt, and silenced them. It was easy to say that there was one thing that was *not* to be done—but after ? Then for the first time in her life Anne felt the disability of her womanhood. This tells for little so long as the relations between men and women are

not in question. It is when these ties begin—and a girl, who has perhaps taken the initiative all her life, finds herself suddenly reduced to silence in face of her lover—that the bond is felt. What could she say or suggest? She had exhausted her powers when she declared with such proud emphasis that to give up was impossible. Then nature, which is above all law, stepped in and silenced her. What could she do further? It was for him to speak. The first sense of this compulsion was both sweet and painful to her—painful, because her mind was overflowing with active energy and purpose which longed for utterance: sweet, as the sign and symbol of a new condition, a union more rich and strange than any individuality. Anne had hesitated little in her life, and had not known what it was to wait. Now she bent her head to the necessity in a curious maze of feeling—bewildered, happy, a little impatient, wondering and hoping, silent as she had never in all her life before been tempted to be.

As for Douglas, he was silent too, with a much less delightful consciousness. In such circumstances

what are the natural things for a man to say? That what his love has is nothing to him, so long as she brings him herself—that if there is only a sacrifice of money in question, no money can be allowed to stand in the way of happiness; that he has no fear, unless it might be for her; that to labour for her, to make her independent of all the fathers in the world, is his first privilege; and that the only thing to be considered is, when and how she will make his happiness complete by trusting herself to his care. These are, no doubt, the right things for a man to say, especially if they happen to be true, but even whether they are quite true or not, as his natural *rôle* requires. Then, on the other side, the woman (if she has any sense) will certainly come in and impose conditions and limit the fulness of the sacrifice; so that, what by masculine boldness of plan, and feminine caution of revisal, something reasonable and practical is at last struck out. But the caution, the repression, the prudence, ought not to be on the man's side. Nothing can be more distinct than this great law. It becomes the woman

to see all the drawbacks, to hold back, and to insist upon every prudential condition, not to make herself a burden upon him or permit him to be overwhelmed by his devotion. But it is not from his side that these suggestions of prudence can be allowed to come, however strongly he may perceive them. Perhaps it is as hard upon the man, who sees all the difficulties, to be compelled to adopt this part, as it is on the woman, accustomed to lead the way, to be silent and hold back. Douglas was in this predicament, if Anne felt all the mingled penalties and privileges of the other. He must do it, or else acknowledge himself a poor creature. And Cosmo had not the slightest inclination to appear a poor creature in Anne's eyes. Yet at the same time he felt that to propose to this impetuous girl—who was quite capable of taking him at his word—that she should marry him at once in face of her father's menace, was madness. What was he to do? He sat silent—for more minutes than Anne's imagination approved. Her heart began to sink, a wondering pang to make itself felt in her breast, not for herself so much as

for him. Was he about to fail to the emergency? to show himself unprepared to meet it? Was he, could it be possible, more concerned about the loss of the money than herself?

‘Here am I in a nice predicament,’ he burst forth at last; ‘what am I to say to you? Anne—you who have been brought up to wealth, who have known nothing but luxury—what am I to say to you? Is it to be my part to bring you down to poverty, to limit your existence? I who have no recommendation save that of loving you, which heaven knows many a better man must share with me; I an intruder whom you did not know a year ago—an interloper——’

There are some cases in which there is no policy like the naked truth. Anne held up her hands to stop him as he went on, exclaiming softly, ‘Cosmo, Cosmo!’ in various tones of reproach and horror. Then at last she stopped him practically, by putting one of her hands upon his mouth—an action which made her blush all over with tender agitation, pleasure, and shame.

‘How can you say such things? Cosmo! I will not hear another word.’

‘Am I anything but an interloper? How is any man worth calling a man to let you sacrifice yourself to him, Anne?’

‘I shall soon think it is you that want to throw me over,’ she said.

This shifted the tragic issue of the question and put him more at ease. If it could but be brought back to the general ground, on which mutual professions of fidelity would suffice and time could be gained! So far as that went, Cosmo knew very well what to say. It was only the practical result that filled him with alarm. Why had he been so hasty in declaring himself? The preliminaries of courtship may go on for years, but the moment an answer has been asked and given, some conclusion must be come to. However, it is always easy to answer a girl when she utters such words as these. He eluded the real difficulty, following her lead, and so filled up the time with lovers’ talk that the hour flew by without any decision. They talked of the

one subject in a hundred different tones—it was all so new, and Anne was so easily transported into that vague and beautiful fairyland where her steps were treading for the first time. And she had so much to say to him on her side; and time has wings, and can fly on some occasions though he is so slow on others. It was she who at the end of many digressions finally discovered that while they had been talking the green terrace below had become vacant, the company dispersed. She started up in alarm.

‘They have all gone in. The game is over. How long we must have been sitting here! And they will be looking for me. I was obliged to say I had a headache. Indeed I had a headache,’ said Anne, suddenly waking to a sense of her subterfuge and hanging her head—for he had laughed—which was a failure of perception on his part and almost roused her pride to arms. But Cosmo was quick-sighted and perceived his mistake.

‘Dear Anne! is this the first issue of faith to me?’ he said. ‘What am I to do, my darling?’

Kill myself for having disturbed your life and made your head ache, or——'

'Do not talk nonsense, Cosmo; but I must go home.'

'And we have been talking nonsense, and have come to no settlement one way or another,' he said, with a look of vexation. Naturally Anne took the blame to herself. It could only be her fault.

'The time has gone so fast,' she said, with a sigh. 'But, perhaps, on the whole, it is best not to settle anything. Let us take a little time to think. Is there any hurry? Nobody can separate us so long as we are faithful to each other. There is no need that I know for—any conclusion.'

Poor Cosmo! there were points in which at this moment his was a hard case. He was obliged to look vexed and complain, though he was so fully convinced of the wisdom of this utterance. 'You forget,' he said tenderly, 'that I have to go away, to return to my life of loneliness—perhaps to ask myself if Anne was only a heavenly dream, a delusion, and to find myself waking——'

‘To what?’ she replied, in her enthusiasm, half angry, ‘to what?’ If you have my heart with you and my thoughts, is not that the best part of me? The Anne that will be with you will be the true Anne, not the outside of her which must stay here.’

‘But I want the outside too. Ah, Anne, if I were to stay here, if I could live at your gate like Charley Ashley (poor fellow!). But you forget that I must go away.’

‘I don’t forget it. When must you go?’ She sank her voice a little and drew closer to him, and looked at him with a cloud rising over her face. He *must* go, there was no eluding that certainty, and to think of it was like thinking of dying—yet of a sweet death to be borne heroically for the sake each of each, and with a speedy bright resurrection in prospect; but it would be an extinction of all the delight of living so long as it lasted. Cosmo’s mind was not so elevated as Anne’s, nor his imagination so inspiring, but the look of visionary anguish and courage went to his heart

'I don't deserve it,' he cried with a broken voice; which was very true. Then recovering himself, 'It would not do for me to linger after what has passed between your father and me. It will be a terrible wrench, and without knowing when we are to meet again. Love, it must be before Saturday,' he said.

They were standing close, very close together, clasping each other's hands. Two tears came into Anne's eyes, great lakes of moisture not falling, though brimming over. But she gave him such a smile as was all the sweeter reflected in them. 'By Friday, then—we must make up our minds what we are to do.'

His fears and doubtfulness yielded for the moment to an impulse of real emotion. 'How am I to live without you, now that I know you?' he said.

'You will not be without me, Cosmo! Did I not tell you the best of me would be with you always? Let us both think with all our might what will be the right thing for us.'

‘I know what I shall feel to be the best, Anne.’ He said this with a little fervour, suddenly coming to see—as now and then a man does—by a sudden inspiration, entirely contrary to his judgment, what would be his only salvation. This answered his purpose far better than any cleverness he could have invented. She shook her head.

‘We must not insist on choosing the happiest way,’ she said. ‘We must wait—in every way, I feel sure that to wait is the only thing we can do.’

‘Certainly not the happiest,’ he said, with emphasis. ‘There is no reason because of that interview with your father why I should not come to say good-bye. I will come on Friday publicly; but to-morrow, Anne, to-morrow, here——’

She gave him her promise without hesitation. There had been no pledge against seeing him asked or given, and it was indispensable that they should settle their plans. And then they parted, he, in the agitation and contagious enthusiasm of the moment, drawn closer to the girl whom he loved, but did not

understand, nearer knowing her than he had ever been before. The impulse kept him up as on borrowed wings as far as the enclosure of the park. Then Cosmo Douglas dropped down to earth, ceased to reflect Anne Mountford, and became himself. She on wings which were her own, and borrowed from no one—wings of pure visionary passion, devotion, faith—skimmed through the light air homeward, her heart wrung, her sweet imagination full of visions, her courage and constancy strong as for life or death.

## CHAPTER V.

## EXPLANATIONS.

IT is an awkward and a painful thing to quarrel with a friend when he is staying under your roof; though in that case it will no doubt make a breach, and he will go away, which will relieve you, even if you regret it afterwards. But if there is no quarrel, yet you find out suddenly that you have a grievance—a grievance profound and bitter, but not permitting of explanation—the state of affairs is more painful still; especially if the friend is thrown into your special society, and not taken from you by the general courtesies of the house. It was in this unfortunate position that the young men at the Rectory found themselves on the evening that followed. There was nobody in the house to diminish the pressure. Mrs Ashley had died some years before,

and the Rector, at that time left much alone, as both his sons were absent at school and university, had fallen into the natural unsocial habits of a solitary. He had been obliged to make life bearable for himself by perpetual reading, and now he could do little but read. He was very attentive to his duty, visiting his sick parishioners with the regularity of clock-work, and not much more warmth ; but when he came in he went to his study, and even at table would furtively bring a book with him, to be gone on with if the occasion served. Charley and Willie were resigned enough to this shutting out of their father from the ordinary social intercourse. It liberated them from the curb imposed by his grave looks and silence. He had always been a silent man. Now that he had not his wife to speak to, utterance was a trouble to him. And even his meals were a trouble to Mr. Ashley. He would have liked his tray brought into his study among his books, which was the doleful habit he had fallen into when he was left to eat the bread of tears alone. He gave up this gratification when the boys were at home,

but it cost him something. And he painfully refrained even from a book when there were visitors, and now and then during the course of a meal would make a solemn remark to them. He was punctilious altogether about strangers, keeping a somewhat dismal watch to see that they were not neglected. This it was which had brought him out of his study when he saw Douglas alone upon the lawn. ‘In your mother’s time,’ he would say, ‘this was considered a pleasant house to stay at. I have given up asking people on my own account; but when you have friends I insist upon attention being paid them.’ This made the curate’s position doubly irksome; he had to entertain the stranger who was his own friend, yet had, he felt, betrayed him. There was nothing to take Douglas even for an hour off his hands. Willie, as the spectator and sympathiser, was even more indignant than his brother, and disposed to show his indignation; and the curate had to satisfy his father and soothe Willie, and go through a semblance of intimate intercourse with his friend all at the same time. His heart was very

heavy ; and, at the best of times, his conversation was not of a lively description ; nor had he the power of throwing off his troubles. The friend who had proved a traitor to him had been his leader, the first fiddle in every orchestra where Charley Ashley had produced his solemn bass. All this made the state of affairs more intolerable. In the evening what could they do ? They had to smoke together in the little den apportioned to this occupation, which the Rector himself detested ; for it rained, to wind up all those miseries. As long as it was fine, talk could be eluded by strolling about the garden ; but in a little room, twelve feet by eight, with their pipes lit and everything calculated to make the contrasts of the broken friendship seem stronger, what could be done ? The three young men sat solemnly, each in a corner, puffing forth clouds of serious smoke. Willie had got a ‘Graphic,’ and was turning it over, pretending to look at the pictures. Charley sat at the open window, with his elbow leaning upon the sill, gazing out into the blackness of the rain. As for Douglas, he tilted his

chair back on its hind legs, and looked just as usual —a smile even hovered about his mouth. He was the offender, but there was no sense of guilt in his mind. The cloud which had fallen on their relationship amused him instead of vexing him. It wrapped Charley Ashley in the profoundest gloom, who was innocent ; but it rather exhilarated the culprit. Ten minutes had passed, and not a word had been said, which was terrible to the sons of the house, but agreeable enough to their guest. He had so much to think of; and what talk could be so pleasant as his own thoughts? certainly not poor Ashley's prosy talk. He swayed himself backward now and then on his chair, and played a tune with his fingers on the table ; and a smile hovered about his mouth. He had passed another hour under the Beeches before the rain came on, and everything had been settled to his satisfaction. He had not required to make any bold proposal, and yet he had been argued with and sweetly persuaded as if he had suggested the rashest instantaneous action. He could not but feel that he had managed this very cleverly, and he

was pleased with himself, and happy. He did not want to talk ; he had Anne to think about, and all her tender confidences, and her looks and ways altogether. She was a girl whose love any man might have been proud of. And no doubt the father's opposition would wear away. He saw no reason to be uneasy about the issue. In these days there is but one way in which such a thing can end, if the young people hold out. And, with a smile of happy assurance, he said to himself that Anne would hold out. She was not a girl that was likely to change.

Some trifling circumstance here attracted Cosmo's attention to the very absurd aspect of affairs. A big moth, tumbling in out of the rain, flew straight at the candle, almost knocked the light out, burned off its wings, poor imbecile, and fell with a heavy thud, scorched and helpless ! upon the floor. The curate, whose life was spent on summer evenings in a perpetual crusade against those self-destroying insects, was not even roused from his gloom by this brief and rapidly-concluded tragedy.

He turned half round, gave a kind of groan by way of remark, and turned again to his gloomy gaze into the rain. Upon this an impulse, almost of laughter, seized Douglas in spite of himself. ‘Charley, old fellow, what are you so grumpy about?’ he said.

This observation from the culprit, whom they were both trying their best not to fall upon and slay, was as a thunderbolt falling between the two brothers. The curate turned his pale countenance round with a look of astonishment. But Willie jumped up from his chair. ‘I can’t stand this,’ he said, ‘any longer. Why should one be so frightened of the rain? I don’t know what you other fellows mean to do, but I am going out.’

‘And we are going to have it out,’ said Cosmo, as the other hurried away. He touched the foot of the curate, who had resumed his former attitude, with his own. ‘Look here, Charley, don’t treat me like this; what have I done?’ he said.

‘Done? I don’t know what you mean. Nothing,’ said the curate, turning his head round

once more, but still with his eyes fixed on the rain.

‘Come in, then, and put it into words. You should not condemn the greatest criminal without a hearing. You think somehow—why shouldn’t you own it? it shows in every look—you think I have stood in your way.’

‘No,’ said Ashley again. His under-lip went out with a dogged resistance, his big eyelids drooped. ‘I haven’t got much of a way—the parish, that’s about all—I don’t see how *you* could do me any damage there.’

‘Why are you so bitter, Charley? If you had ever taken me into your confidence you may be sure I would not have interfered—whatever it might have cost me.’

‘I should like to know what you are talking about,’ the other said, diving his hands into the depths of his pockets, and turning to the rain once more.

‘Would you? I don’t think it; and it’s no good naming names. Look here. Will you believe me

if I say I never meant to interfere ? I never found out what was in your mind till it was too late.'

' I don't know that there is anything in my mind,' Charley said. He was holding out with all his might ; but the fibres of his heart were giving way, and the ice melting. To be sure, how should any one have found out ? had it not been hidden away at the very bottom of his heart ? Anne had never suspected it, how should Cosmo ? He would not even turn his head to speak ; but he was going, going ! he felt it, and Douglas saw it. The offender got up, and laid his hand upon the shoulder of his wounded friend.

' I'd rather have cut off my hand, or tugged out my heart, than wound you, Charley ; but I never knew till it was too late.'

All this, perhaps, was not quite true ; but it was true—enough. Douglas did not want to quarrel ; he liked his faithful old retainer. A bird in the hand—that is always worth something, though perhaps not so much as is the worth of the two who are in the bush ; and he is a foolish man who will turn away the

certain advantage of friendship for the chance of love; anyhow, the address went entirely into the simple, if wounded, heart.

‘I didn’t mean to show I was vexed. I don’t know that I’m vexed—a man is not always in the same disposition,’ he said, but his voice was changing. Douglas patted him on the shoulder, and went back to his seat.

‘You needn’t envy me—much,’ said Douglas. ‘We don’t know what’s to come of it; the father won’t hear of me. He would have had nothing to say to you either, and think what a rumpus it would have made in the parish ! And there’s the Rector to think of. Charley——’

‘Perhaps you are right,’ Charley said, with a great heave of his shoulders. His pipe had gone out. As he spoke, he got up slowly, and came to the table to look for the matches. Cosmo lighted one, and held it out to him, looking on with interest while the solemn process of rekindling was gone through. Charley’s face, lighted by the fitful flame as he puffed, was still as solemn as if it had been a question of life

and death ; and Cosmo, looking on, kept his gravity too. When this act was accomplished, the curate in silence gripped his friend's hand, and thus peace was made. Poor faithful soul ; his heart was still as heavy as lead—but pain was possible, though strife was not possible. A load was taken off his honest breast.

‘I've seen it coming,’ he said, puffing harder than was needful. ‘I oughtn't to have felt it so much. After all, why should I grumble ? I never could have been the man.’

‘ You are a far better fellow than I am,’ cried the other, with a little burst of real feeling.

Charley puffed and puffed, with much exertion. The red gleam of the pipe got reflected under his shaggy eyebrows in something liquid. Then he burst into an unsteady laugh.

‘ You might as well fire a damp haystack as light a pipe that's gone out,’ was the next sentimental remark he made.

‘ Have a cigar ? ’ said Cosmo, tenderly, producing a case out of his pocket, with eager benevolence. And thus their peace was made. Anne's name was

not mentioned, neither was there anything said but these vague allusions to the state of affairs generally. Of all things in the world sentimental explanations are most foreign to the intercourse of young Englishmen with each other. But when Willie Ashley returned, very wet, and with an incipient cold in his head from the impatient flight he had made, he was punished for his cowardly abandonment of an unpleasant position by finding his brother with the old bonds refitted upon him, completely restored to his old devotion and subjection to Cosmo. Willie retired to bed soon after, kicking off his boots with an energy which was full of wrath. ‘The fool!’ he said to himself; while the reconciled pair carried on their tobacco and their reunion till far in the night. They were not conversational, however, though they were reconciled. Conversation was not necessary to the curate’s view of social happiness, and Cosmo was glad enough to go back upon his own thoughts.

While this was going on at the Rectory, Anne for her part was submitting to a still more severe course of interrogation. Mrs. Mountford had dis-

cussed the question with herself at some length, whether she should take any notice or not of the domestic convulsion which had occurred under her very eye without having been brought openly to her cognisance. Her husband had of course told her all about it; but Anne had not said anything—had neither consulted her stepmother nor sought her sympathy. After a while, however, Mrs. Mountford sensibly decided that to ignore a matter of such importance, or to make-believe that she was not acquainted with it, would be equally absurd. Accordingly she arranged that Rose should be sent for after dinner to have a dress tried on; which was done, to that young lady's great annoyance and wrath. Mrs. Worth, Mrs. Mountford's maid, was not a person who could be defied with impunity. She was the goddess Fashion, *La Mode* impersonified at Mount. Under her orders she had a niece, who served as maid to Anne and Rose; and these two together made the dresses of the family. It was a great economy, Mrs. Mountford said, and all the

county knew how completely successful it was. But to the girls it was a trouble, if an advantage. Mrs. Worth studied their figures, their complexions, and what she called their ‘*hidiousincrasies*’—but she did not study the hours that were convenient for them, or make allowance for their other occupations. And she was a tyrant, if a beneficent one. So Rose had to go, however loth. Lady Meadowlands was about to give a *fête*, a great garden party, at which all ‘the best people’ were to be assembled. And a new dress was absolutely necessary. ‘Wouldn’t it do in the morning?’ she pleaded. But Mrs. Worth was inexorable. And so it happened that her mother had a quiet half-hour in which to interrogate Anne.

The drawing-room was on the side of the house overlooking the flower garden; the windows, a great row of them, flush with the wall outside and so possessing each a little recess of its own within, were all open, admitting more damp than air, and a chilly freshness and smell of the earth instead of the scents of the mignonette. There were two lamps at dif-

ferent ends of the room, which did not light it very well: but Mrs. Mountford was economical. Anne had lit the candles on the writing-table for her own use, and she was a long way off the sofa on which her stepmother sat, with her usual tidy basket of neatly-arranged wools beside her. A little time passed in unbroken quiet, disturbed by nothing but the soft steady downfall of the rain through the great open space outside, and the more distant sound of pattering upon the trees. When Mrs. Mountford said ‘Anne,’ her stepdaughter did not hear her at first. But there was a slight infraction of the air, and she knew that something had been said.

‘Did you speak, mamma?’

‘I want to speak to you, Anne. Yes, I think I did say your name. Would you mind coming here for a little? I want to say something to you while Rose is away.’

Anne divined at once what it must be. And she was not unreasonable—it was right that Mrs. Mount-

ford should know: how could she help but know, being the wife of one of the people most concerned? And the thing which Anne chiefly objected to was that her stepmother knew everything about her by a sort of back way, thus arriving at a clandestine knowledge not honestly gained. It was not the stepmother that was to blame, but the father and fate. She rose and went forward slowly through the partial light—reluctant to be questioned, yet not denying that to ask was Mrs. Mountford's right.

'I sent her away on purpose, Anne. She is too young. I don't want her to know any more than can be helped. My dear, I was very sorry to hear from your father that you had got into that kind of trouble so soon.'

'I don't think I have got into any trouble,' said Anne.

'No, of course I suppose *you* don't think so; but I have more experience than you have, and I am sorry your mind should have been disturbed so soon.'

'Do you call it so very soon?' said Anne. 'I am twenty-one.'

‘So you are ; I forgot. Well ! but it is always too soon when it is not suitable, my dear.’

‘It remains to be seen whether it is not suitable, mamma.’

‘My love ! do you think so little of your father’s opinion ? That ought to count above everything else, Anne. A gentleman is far better able to form an opinion of another gentleman than we are. Mr. Douglas, I allow, is good-looking and well-bred. I liked him well enough myself ; but that is not all—you must acknowledge that is not half enough.’

‘My father seems to want a great deal less,’ said Anne ; ‘all that he asks is about his family and his money.’

‘Most important particulars, Anne, however romantic you may be ; you must see that.’

‘I am not romantic,’ said Anne, growing red, and resenting the imputation, as was natural ; ‘and I do not deny they are important details ; but not surely to be considered first as the only things worth caring for—which is what my father does.’

‘What do you consider the things worth caring for, dear? Be reasonable. Looks?’ said Mrs. Mountford, laying down her work upon her lap with a benevolent smile. ‘Oh, Anne, my dear child, at your age we are always told that beauty is skin-deep, but we never believe it. And I am not one that would say very much in that respect. I like handsome people myself; but dear, dear, as life goes on, if you have nothing but looks to trust to——!’

‘I assure you,’ said Anne, vehemently, succeeding after two or three attempts to break in, ‘I should despise myself if I thought that beauty was anything. It is almost as bad as money. Neither the one nor the other is yourself.’

‘Oh, I would not go so far as that,’ said Mrs. Mountford, with indulgence. ‘Beauty is a great deal in my opinion, though perhaps it is gentlemen that think most about it. But, my dear Anne, you are a girl that has always thought of duty. I will do you the justice to say that. You may have liked

your own way, but even to me, that have not the first claim upon you, you have always been very good. I hope you are not going to be rebellious now. You must remember that your father's judgment is far more mature than yours. He knows the world. He knows what men are.'

'So long as he does not know—one thing,' said Anne, indignantly, 'what can all that other information matter to me?'

'And what is the one thing, dear?' Mrs. Mountford said.

Anne did not immediately reply. She went to the nearest window and closed it, for sheer necessity of doing something; then lingered, looking out upon the rain and the darkness of the night.

'Thank you, that is quite right,' said her step-mother. 'I did not know that window was open. How damp it is, and how it rains! Anne, what is the one thing? Perhaps I might be of some use if you would tell me. What is it your father does not know?'

‘Me,’ said Anne, coming slowly back to the light. Her slight white figure had the pose of a tall lily, so light, so firm, that its very fragility looked like strength. And her face was full of the constancy upon which, perhaps, she prided herself a little—the loyalty that would not give up a dog, as she said. Mrs. Mountford called it obstinacy, of course. ‘But what does that matter,’ she added, with some vehemence, ‘when in every particular we are at variance? I do not think as he does in anything. What he prizes I do not care for—and what I prize——’

‘My dear, it is your father you are speaking of. Of course he must know better than a young girl like you——’

‘Mamma, it is not his happiness that is involved—it is mine! and I am not such a young girl—I am of age. How can he judge for me in what is to be the chief thing in my life?’

‘Anne,’ said Mrs. Mountford kindly, ‘this young man is almost a stranger to you—you had never

seen him a year ago. Is it really true, and are you quite sure that this involves the happiness of your life ?'

Anne made no reply. How otherwise ? she said indignantly in her heart. Was she a girl to deceive herself in such a matter—was she one to make protestations ? She held her head high, erecting her white throat more like a lily than ever. But she said nothing. What was there to say ? She could not speak or tell anyone but herself what Cosmo was to her. The sensitive blood was ready to mount into her cheeks at the mere breathing of his name.

Mrs. Mountford shook her head. ' Oh, foolish children,' she said, ' you are all the same. Don't think you are the only one, Anne. When you are as old as I am you will have learned that a father's opinion is worth taking, and that your own is not so infallible after all.'

' I suppose,' said Anne softly, ' you are twice my age, mamma—that would be a long time to wait to see which of us was right.'

‘I am more than twice your age,’ said Mrs. Mountford, with a little heat; then suddenly changing her tone, ‘Well! so this is the new fashion we have been hearing so much of. Turn round slowly that I may see if it suits you, Rose.’

## CHAPTER VI.

## GOOD-BYE.

NEXT day was one of those crowning days of summer which seem the climax, and at the same time the conclusion, of the perfect year. From morning till night there was no shadow upon it, no threatening of a cloud, no breath of unfriendly air. The flowers in the Mount gardens blazed from the level beds in their framework of greenness, the great masses of summer foliage stood out against the soft yet brilliant sky ; every outline was round and distinct, detaching itself in ever-varying lines, one curve upon another. Had the weather been less perfect their distinctness would have been excessive and marred the unity of the landscape, but the softness of the summer air harmonised everything in sight and sound alike. The voices on the terrace mingled

in subtle musical tones at intervals ; and, though every branch of the foliage was perfect in itself, yet all were melodiously mingled, and belonged to each other. On the sea-shore and among the hills distance seemed annihilated, and every outline pressed upon the eye, too bright, too near for pleasure, alarming the weather-wise. But here, so warmly inland, in a landscape so wealthy and so soft, the atmosphere did not exaggerate, it only brightened. It was the end of August, and changes were preparing among the elements. Next day it might be autumn with a frost-touch somewhere, the first yellow leaf; but to-day it was full summer, a meridian more rich than that of June, yet still meridian, full noon of the seasons.

Il nous reste un gâteau de fête ;  
Demain nous aurons du pain noir :

Anne woke up this heavenly morning saying these words to herself. It had rained half the night through, and the morning had risen pale, exhausted as with all this weeping : but after awhile had thought better of it, and sworn to have, ere summer

ended, one other resplendent day. Then the sun had got up to his work like a bridegroom, eternal image, in a flush of sacred pride and joy. People said to each other ‘What a lovely day !’ Though it had been a fine summer, and the harvest had been got in with the help of many a lusty morning and blazing afternoon, yet there was something in this that touched the general heart ; perhaps because it was after the rain, perhaps because something in the air told that it was the last, that Nature had surpassed herself, and after this was capable of nothing further. As a matter of fact, nobody could do anything for the delight of the exquisite morning. First one girl stole out, and then another, through the garden, upon which the morning sun was shining ; then Mrs. Mountford sailed forth under the shelter of her parasol. Even she, though she was half ashamed of herself, being plump, had put on, dazzled by the morning, a white gown. ‘Though I am too old for white,’ she said with a sigh. ‘Not too old, but a little too stout, ’m,’ said Mrs. Worth, with that ferocious frankness which we have all to submit

to from our maids. None of the three reappeared again till the luncheon-bell rang, so demoralised were they. Anne, if truth must be told, went towards the Beeches : ‘Il nous reste un gâteau de fête,’ she sang to herself under her breath, ‘ Demain nous aurons du pain noir.’

The same thing happened at the Rectory : even the rector himself came out, wandering, by way of excusing himself for the idleness, about the flower-beds. ‘The bedding-out plants have done very well this year,’ he said ; but he was not thinking of the bedding-out plants any more than the young men were thinking of their cigars. In their minds there was that same sense of the one bit of cake remaining to eat which was in Anne’s song. Charley, who had not the cake, but was only to stand by and assist while his friend eat it, was sympathetically excited, yet felt a little forlorn satisfaction in the approaching resumption of the *pain noir*. He was never to get anything better, it appeared ; but it would be pleasanter fare when the munching of the *gâteau* was over. And Douglas stole off to consume that last

morsel when the curate, reluctantly, out of the sweetness of the morning, went off to his schools. Under the Beeches the day was like a fresh bit out of Paradise. If Adam and Eve are only a fable, as the scientific gentlemen say, what a poet Moses was! Eden has never gone out of fashion to this day. The two under the trees, but for her muslin and his tweed, were, over again, the primæval pair—and perhaps the serpent was about too: but neither Eve had seen it, nor Adam prepared that everlasting plea of self-defence which has been handed down through all his sons. This was how the charmed hours stole on, and the perfection of summer passed through the perfection of noon; so many perfections touching each other! a perfect orb of loveliness and happiness, with that added grace which makes perfection more perfect, the sense of incompleteness—the human crown of hope. All the time they were thinking of the something better, something sweeter, that was to come. ‘Will there ever be such another perfect day?’ she said, in a wonder at the new discovered bliss with which she was sur-

rounded. ‘Yes, the next,’ he said, ‘on which we shall not have to part.’ To be sure: there was the parting; without that conclusion, perhaps, this hour would not have been so exquisite: but it was still some hours off, thank heaven!

After luncheon the chairs were carried out to the green terrace where the shadow of the limes fell. The limes got in the way of the sun almost as soon as he began to descend, and threw the most delicious dancing shadow over the grass—a shadow that was quite effectual, and kept the lawn as cool as in the middle of a forest, but which was in itself a lovely living thing, in soft perpetual motion, every little twig and green silken leaf contributing its particular canopy, and flinging down a succession of little bobs and curtseys with every breath of air that blew. ‘Everybody will be out to-day, and I daresay we shall have a great many visitors. Tell Saymore he may bring out the big table,’ said Mrs. Mountford. She liked to feel that her house was the chief house in the neighbourhood, the place to which everybody came. Mrs. Mountford had regretfully

relinquished by this time her white gown. We all cling to our white gowns, but when you are stout, it must be acknowledged the experiment is rash. She had not been able to get Mrs. Worth's candid criticism out of her mind all the morning. 'Do I look very stout, Rose?' she had said, in an unconsciously ingratiating tone. And Rose was still more entirely impartial than Worth. She threw a careless glance at her mother. 'You do look fat, mamma!' she said. It was hard upon the poor lady; she changed it, with a sigh, for her darkest silk. 'Not black, Worth,' she said faintly. 'If I had my way, 'm,' said Worth, 'I'd dress you always in black. There is nothing like it when one gets to a certain time of life.' It was under the influence of this sobering *douche* that Mrs. Mountford came out again, accompanied by Saymore with her workbasket. It was put down upon the table, a dazzling bit of colour. 'But I really don't feel inclined to work. It is too fine to work,' Mrs. Mountford said. 'What is that you are singing for ever, Anne? I have heard you at it all day.'

Il nous reste un gâteau de fête ;  
Demain nous aurons du pain noir.

Anne sang without changing colour, though her heart was beating ; she had become too breathless for conversation. When would he come for the farewell, and what would her father say ? Would he hear of it and come out ? What was to happen ? She sat very still in her basket-chair, with all the lime leaves waving over her, letting in stray gleams of sunshine that ornamented her as with lines of jewels here and there.

Then, after an interval, two dark figures were seen upon the whiteness and unsheltered light of the road through the park. ‘There are the Ashley boys,’ said Rose. ‘Anne, you will be obliged to play to-day.’

‘The Ashley boys ! Now that Charley is ordained, you should speak with more respect,’ said Mrs. Mountford. Anne looked up, and her heart seemed to stand still—only two of them ! But she soon satisfied herself that it was not Cosmo that was the

defaulter ; she sat, not saying anything, scarcely daring to breathe. The moment had come.

Willie Ashley had not regarded with much satisfaction the reconciliation which he found to his great amazement had taken place while he was out in the rain. Indeed the attitude of his mind had been nothing less than one of disgust, and when he found next day that Douglas was setting out arm-in-arm with the curate, and almost more confidential than before, to walk to Mount, his impatience rose to such a point that he flung off altogether. ‘Two may be company, but three is none,’ he said to his brother. ‘I thought you had a little more spirit ; I’m not going to Mount : if you can see yourself cut out like that, I can’t. I’ll walk up as far as the Woodheads’ ; I daresay they’ll be very glad to get up a game there.’ This was how there were only two figures on the road. They were very confidential, and perhaps the curate was supported more than he himself was aware by the certainty that his friend was going away that night. Henceforward the field would be clear. It was not that he had

any hope of supplanting Cosmo in his turn, as he had been supplanted; but still to have him away would be something. The black bread is wholesome fare enough when there is not some insolent happiness in the foreground insisting upon devouring before you its hunches of cake.

‘I declare,’ said Mrs. Mountford, ‘there is *that* Mr. Douglas with Charley Ashley! What am I to do? I am sure it is not Willie—he is taller and bigger, and has a different appearance altogether. You cannot expect me, Anne, to meet anyone whom papa disapproves. What shall I do? Run, Rose, and tell Saymore; but of course Charley will not knock at the door like an ordinary visitor—he will come straight here. I have always thought these familiarities should not have been permitted. They will come straight here, though they know he has been sent away and forbidden the house.’

‘He has never been forbidden the house,’ cried Anne indignantly. ‘I hope, mamma, you will not be so uncivil as to refuse to say good-bye to Mr. Douglas. He is going away.’

'Forbidden the house!' cried Rose, her eyes opening up like two great O's. 'Then it is true!'

'You had better go away at least, if I must stay,' said Mrs. Mountford in despair. 'Rosie, run indoors and stay in the drawing-room till he is gone. It would be in far better taste, Anne, and more dutiful, if you were to go too.'

Anne did not say a word, partly, no doubt, in determined resistance, but partly because just then her voice had failed her, the light was swimming in her eyes, and the air seemed to be full of pairs of dark figures approaching from every different way.

'Run indoors! why should I?' said Rose. 'He can't do any harm to me; besides I like Mr. Douglas. Why shouldn't he come and say good-bye? It would be very uncivil of him if he didn't, after being so much here.'

'That is just what I am always saying; you have them constantly here, and then you are surprised when things happen,' cried Mrs. Mountford, wringing her hands. 'Anne, if you have any feeling you ought to take your sister away.'

Rose's eyes grew rounder and rounder. 'Was it *me* he was in love with, then?' she asked, not without reason. But by this time it was too late for anyone to run away, as the young men were already making their way across the flower-garden, and could see every movement the ladies made.

'Sit down, sit down, if it must be so,' said Mrs. Mountford, 'and for heaven's sake let us have no scene; look at least as if it were a common call and meant nothing—that is the only thing to do now.' 'How d'ye do, how d'ye do, Charley,' she said, waving her hand in friendly salutation; 'was there ever such a lovely day? Come and sit down; it is too fine for a game. Is that Mr. Douglas you have with you? I was quite blinded with the sun this morning, I can't get it out of my eyes. How do you do? —you will excuse my looking surprised; I thought I heard that you had gone away.'

'Not yet,' he said; 'I hope you did not think me so little grateful for all your kindness as not to make my acknowledgments before leaving the parish.'

I have lingered longer than I ought to have done, but every happiness must come to an end, and I am bound for Beeton this afternoon to catch the Scotch mail to-night.'

Mrs. Mountford made him a little bow, by way of showing that her interest in this was no more than politeness demanded, and returned to the curate, to whom she was not generally so gracious. 'I hope your father is well,' she said; 'and Willie, where is Willie? It is not often he fails. When we saw you crossing the park just now I made sure it was Willie that was with you. I suppose we shall not have him much longer. He should not disappoint his friends like this.'

'I fear,' said Douglas ('thrusting himself in again; so ill-bred, when he could see I meant to snub him,' Mrs. Mountford said), 'that Willie's absence is my fault. He likes to have his brother to himself, and I don't blame him. However, I am so soon to leave the coast clear! If anything could have made it more hard to turn one's back upon Mount it would be leaving it on such a day. Fancy

going from this paradise of warmth and sunshine to the cold North !'

'To Scotland ?' cried Rose ; 'that's just what I should like to do. You may call this paradise if you like, but it's dull. Paradise would be dull always, don't you think, with nothing happening. To be sure, there's Lady Meadowlands' fête ; but one knows exactly what that will be--at least, almost exactly,' Rose added, brightening a little, and feeling that a little opening was left for fate.

'Let us hope it will be as different as possible from what you expect. I have known garden-parties turn out so that one was not in the least like another,' said Douglas smilingly, accepting the transfer to Rose which Mrs. Mountford's too apparent snub made necessary. Anne, for her part, did not say a word ; she sat quite still in the low basket-chair, scarcely venturing to look up, listening to the tones of his voice and the smile which seemed to pervade his words with that strange half-stunned, half-happy sensation which precedes a parting. Yes, it was happiness still to feel him there, and recog-

nise every distinctive sound of the voice which had awoke her heart. Was there no way of stopping this flying moment, arresting it, so that it should last, or coming to an end in it, which is the suggested sentiment of all perfection ? She sat as in a dream, longing to make it last, yet impatient that it should be over ; wondering how it was to end, and whether any words more important than these might pass between them still. They had taken farewell of each other under the Beeches. This postscript was almost more than could be borne—intolerable, yet sweet. The voices went on, while the scene turned round and round with Anne, the background of the flowers confusing her eyes, and the excitement mounting to her head. At last, before they had been a moment there, she thought—though it was half an hour—the dark figures had risen up again and hands were being held out. Then she felt her dress twitched, and ‘Let us walk to the end of the garden with them,’ said Rose. This made a little commotion, and Anne in her dream felt Mrs. Mountford’s exhortation—‘Girls !’ in a horrified

undertone, ‘what can you be thinking of? Rosie, are you crazy? ANNE!’

This last was almost in a shriek of excitement. But Rose was far too much used to her own way to pay any attention. ‘Come along,’ she said, linking her fingers in her sister’s. Anne, who was the leader in everything, followed for the first time in her life.

The garden was sweet with all manner of autumn flowers, banks of mignonette and heliotrope perfuming the air, and red geraniums blazing in the sunshine—all artificial in their formal beds, just as this intercourse was artificial, restrained by the presence of spectators and the character of the scene. By-and-by, however, Rose untwined her hand from her sister’s. ‘There is no room to walk so many abreast; go on with Mr. Douglas, Anne; I have something to say to Charley,’ the girl cried. She was curious, tingling to her fingers’ ends with a desire to know all about it. She turned her round eyes upon Charley with an exciting look of interrogation as soon as the other pair had gone on before. Poor Ashley had drooped his big head; he would have

turned his back if he could to give them the benefit of this last moment, but he felt that he could not be expected not to feel it. And as for satisfying the curiosity of this inquisitive imp, whose eyes grew bigger and bigger every moment! he dropped his nice brown beard upon his bosom, and sighed, and slightly shook his head. ‘Tell me what it means, or I’ll tell mamma ou’re helping them,’ whispered Rose. ‘Can’t you see what it means?’ said the curate, with a glance, she thought, of contempt. What did she know about it? A blush of humiliation at her own ignorance flew over Rose.

‘I owe your little sister something for this,’ said Douglas, under his breath. ‘Once more we two against the world, Anne!’

‘Not against the world; everything helps us, Cosmo. I did not think I could even venture to look at you, and now we can say good-bye again.’

His fingers twined into hers among the folds of her gown, as Rose’s had done a minute before. They could say good-bye again, but they had no words. They moved along together slowly, not walking that

they knew of, carried softly as by a wave of supreme emotion ; then, after another moment, Anne felt the landscape slowly settling, the earth and the sky getting back into their places, and she herself coming down by slow gyrations to earth again. She was standing still at the corner of the garden, with once more two dark figures upon the white road, but this time not approaching—going away.

‘Tell me about it, tell me all about it, Anne. I did it on purpose ; I wanted to see how you would behave. You just behaved exactly like other people, and shook hands with him the same as I did. I will stand your friend with papa and everybody if you will tell me all about it, Anne.’

Mrs. Mountford also was greatly excited ; she came sailing down upon them with her parasol expanded and fanning herself as she walked. ‘I never had such a thing to do,’ she said ; ‘I never had such an awkward encounter in my life. It is not that I have any dislike to the man, he has always been very civil ; though I must say, Anne, that I think, instead of coming, it would have been better taste

if he had sent a note to say good-bye. And if you consider that I had not an idea what to say to him ! and that I was in a state of mind all the time, saying to myself, “ Goodness gracious ! if papa should suddenly walk round the corner, what should we all do ? ” I looked for papa every moment all the time. People always do come if there is any special reason for not wanting them. However, I hope it is all over now, and that you will not expose us to such risks any more.’

Anne made no reply to either of her companions. She stole away from them as soon as possible, to subdue the high beating of her own heart, and come down to the ordinary level. No, she was not likely to encounter any such risks again ; the day was over and with it the last cake of the feast : the black bread of every day was all that now furnished forth the tables. A kind of dull quiet fell upon Mount and all the surrounding country. The clouds closed round and hung low. People seemed to speak in whispers. It was a quiet that whispered of fate, and in which the elements of storm might be lurking.

But still it cannot be said that the calm was unhappy. The light had left the landscape, but only for the moment. The banquet was over, but there were fresh feasts to come. Everything fell back into the old conditions, but nothing was as it had been. The world was the same, yet changed in every particular. Without any convulsion, or indeed any great family disturbance, how did this happen unsuspected? Everything in heaven and earth was different, though all things were the same.

## CHAPTER VII.

## CROSS-EXAMINATION.

THE change that is made in a quiet house in the country when the chief source of life and emotion is closed for one or other of the inhabitants is such a thing as ‘was never said in rhyme.’ There may be nothing tragical, nothing final about it, but it penetrates through every hour and every occupation. The whole scheme of living seems changed, although there may be no change in any habit. It is, indeed, the very sameness and unity of the life, the way in which every little custom survives, in which the feet follow the accustomed round, the eyes survey the same things, the very same words come to the lips that make the difference so palpable. This was what Anne Mountford felt now. To outward seeming her existence was absolutely as before. It was not an

exciting life, but it had been a happy one. Her mind was active and strong, and capable of sustaining itself. Even in the warm and soft stagnation of her home, her life had been like a running stream always in movement, turning off at unexpected corners, flowing now in one direction, now another, making unexpected leaps and variations of its own. She had the wholesome love of new things and employments which keeps life fresh ; and there had scarcely been a week in which she had not had some new idea or other, quickly copied and turned into matter-of-fact prose by her little sister. This had made Mount lively even when there was nothing going on. And for months together nothing did go on at Mount. It was not a great country house filled with fashionable visitors in the autumn and winter, swept clean of all its inhabitants in spring. The Mountfords stayed at home all the year round, unless it were at the fall of the leaf, when sometimes they would go to Brighton, sometimes at the very deadliest season to town. They had nobody to visit them except an occasional old friend belonging to some other county family, who understood

the kind of life and lived the same at home. On these occasions if the friend were a little superior they would ask Lord and Lady Meadowlands to dinner, but if not they would content themselves with the clergymen of the two neighbouring parishes, and the Woodheads, whose house was not much more than a villa. Lately, since the girls grew up, the ‘game’ in the afternoon which brought young visitors to the house in summer had added to the mild amusements of this life ; but the young people who came were always the same, and so were the old people in the village, who had to be visited, and to have flannels prepared for them against Christmas, and their savings taken care of. When a young man ‘went wrong,’ or a girl got into trouble, it made the greatest excitement in the parish. ‘Did you hear that Sally Lawson came home to her mother on Saturday, sent away from her place at a moment’s notice ?’ or : ‘Old Gubbins’s boy has enlisted. Did you ever hear anything so sad —the one the rector took so much pains with, and helped on so in his education ?’ It was very sad for the Gubbineses and Lawsons, but it was a great god-

send to the parish. And when Lady Meadowlands' mother, old Lady Prayray Poule, went and married, actually *married* at sixty, it did the very county, not to speak of those parishes which had the best right to the news, good. This was the way in which life passed at Mount. And hitherto Anne had supplemented and made it lively with a hundred pursuits of her own. Even up to the beginning of August, when Mr. Douglas, who had left various reminiscences behind him of his Christmas visit, came back—having enjoyed himself so much on the previous occasion, as he said—Anne had continued in full career of those vigorous fancies which kept her always interested. She had sketched indefatigably all the spring and early summer, growing almost fanatical about the tenderness of the shadows and the glory of the lights. Then finding the cottages, which were so picturesque, and figured in so many sketches, to be too wretched for habitation, though they were inhabited, she had rushed into building, into plans, and elevations, and measurements, which it was difficult to force Mr. Mountford's attention to, but which were evidently a .

step in the right direction. But on Douglas's second arrival these occupations had been unconsciously intermitted, they had been pushed aside by a hundred little engagements which the Ashleys had managed to make for the entertainment of their friend. There had been several pic-nics, and a party at the rectory —the first since Mrs. Ashley's death—and a party at the Woodheads', the only other people in the parish capable of entertaining. Then there had been an expedition to the Castle, which the Meadowlands, on being informed that Charley Ashley's friend was anxious to see it, graciously combined with a luncheon and a 'game' in the afternoon. And then there was the game at Mount on all the other afternoons. Who could wonder, as Mrs. Mountford said, that something had come of it? The young men had been allowed to come continually about the house. No questions had been asked, no conditions imposed upon them. 'Thou shalt not make love to thy entertainer's daughter' had not been written up, as it ought to have been, on the lodge. And now all this was over. Like a scene at the theatre,

opening up, gliding off with nothing but a little jar of the carpentry, this momentous episode was concluded and the magician gone. And Anne Mountford returned to the existence—which was exactly as it had been of old.

The other people did not see any difference in it ; and to her the wonderful thing was that there was no difference in it. She had been in paradise, caught up, and had seen unspeakable things ; but now that she had dropped down again, though for a moment the earth seemed to jar and tingle under her feet as they came in contact with it, there was no difference. Her plans were there just the same, and the question still to settle about how far the pig-sty must be distant from the house ; and old Saymore re-emerged to view making up his bouquets for the vases, and holding his head on one side as he looked at them, to see how they ‘composed ;’ and Mrs. Worth, who all this time had been making dresses and trying different shades to find out what would best set off Miss Rose’s complexion. They had been going on like the figures on the barrel-organ, doing

the same thing all the time—never varying or changing. Anne looked at them all with a kind of doleful amusement, gyrating just in the old way, making the same little bobs and curtseys. They had no want of interest or occupation, always moving quite contentedly to the old tunes, turning round and round. Mr. Mountford sat so many hours in his business-room, walked one day, rode the next for needful exercise, sat just so long in the drawing-room in the evening. His wife occupied herself an hour every morning with the cook, took her wool-work at eleven, and her drive at half-past two, except when the horses were wanted. Anne came back to it all, with a little giddiness from her expedition to the empyrean, and looked at the routine with a wondering amusement. She had never known before how like clockwork it was. Now her own machinery, always a little eccentric, declined to acknowledge that key: some sort of new motive power had got into her, which disturbed the action of the other. She began again with a great many jerks and jars, a great many times: and then would

stop and look at all the others in their unconscious dance, moving round and round, and laugh to herself with a little awe of her discovery. Was this what the scientific people meant by the automatic theory, she wondered, being a young woman who read everything; but then in a law which permitted no exceptions, how was it that she herself had got out of gear?

Rose, who followed her sister in everything, wished very much to follow her in this too. She had always managed to find out about every new impulse before, and catch the way of it, though the impulse itself was unknown to her. She gave Anne no rest till she had ascertained about this too. ‘Tell us what it is like,’ she said, with a hundred repetitions. ‘How did you first find out that he cared for you? What put it into your head? Was it anything he said that made you think *that*? As it is probably something that one time or another will happen to me too, I think it is dreadful of you not to tell me. Had you never found it out till he told you? and what did he say? Did he ask you all at

once if you would marry him? or did it all come on by degrees?

'How do you think I can tell?' said Anne; 'it is not a thing you can put into words. I think it all came on by degrees.'

But this, though it was her own formula, did not satisfy Rose. 'I am sure you could tell me a great deal more if you only would,' she cried; 'what did he *say*? Now, *that* you can't help remembering; you must know what he said. Did he tell you he was in love with you, or ask you straight off to marry him? You can't have forgotten that—it is not so very long ago.'

'But, Rosie, I could not tell you. It is not the words, it is not anything that could be repeated. A woman should hear that for the first time,' said Anne, with shy fervour, turning away her head to hide the blush, 'when it is said to herself.'

'A woman! Then you call yourself a woman now? I am only a girl; is that one of the things that show?' asked Rose, gravely, in pursuit of her inquiry. 'Well, then, you ought surely to let me

know what kind of a thing it is. Are you so very fond of him as people say in books? are you always thinking about him? Anne, it is dreadfully mean of you to keep it all to yourself. Tell me one thing: when he said it first, did he go down upon his knees?

‘What nonsense you are talking!’ said Anne, with a burst of laughter. Then there rose before her in sweet confusion a recollection of various moments in which Rose, always matter-of-fact, might have described her lover as on his knees. ‘You don’t know anything about it,’ she said, ‘and I can’t tell you anything about it. I don’t know myself, Rosie; it was all like a dream.’

‘It is you who are talking nonsense,’ said Rose. ‘How could it be like a dream? In a dream you wake up and it is all over; but it is not a bit over with you. Well, then, *after*, how did it feel, Anne? Was he always telling you you were pretty? Did he call you “dear,” and “love,” and all that sort of thing? It would be so *very* easy to tell me—and I do so want to know.’

‘Do you remember, Rose,’ said Anne, with a little solemnity, ‘how we used to wish for a brother? We thought we could tell him everything, and ask him questions as we never could do to papa, and yet it would be quite different from telling each other. He would know better; he would be able to tell us quantities of things, and yet he would understand what we meant too.’

‘I remember you used to wish for it,’ said Rose, honestly, ‘and that it would have been such a very good thing for the entail.’

‘Then,’ said Anne, with fervour, it is a little like that—like what we thought that would be. One feels that one’s heart is running over with things to say. One wants to tell him everything, what happened when one was a little girl, and all the nonsense that has ever been in one’s mind. I told him even about that time I was shut up in the blue room, and how frightened I was. Everything! it does not matter if it is a trifle. One knows he will not think it a trifle. Exactly—at least almost exactly, like what it would be to have a brother—but yet

with a difference too,' Anne added, after a pause, blushing, she could scarcely tell why.

'Ah!' said Rose, with great perspicacity, 'but the difference is just what I want to know.'

The oracle, however, made no response, and in despair the pertinacious questioner changed the subject a little. 'If you will not tell me what he said, nor what sort of a thing it is, you may at least let me know one thing—what are you going to do?'

'Nothing,' said Anne, softly. She stood with her hands clasped before her, looking with some wistfulness into the blueness of the distant air, as if into the future, shaking her head a little, acknowledging to herself that she could not see into it.  
'Nothing—so far as I know.'

'Nothing! are you going to be in love, and engaged, and all that, and yet do *nothing*? I know papa will not consent—mamma told me. She said you would have to give up everything if you married him; and that it would be a good thing for——'

Here Rose paused, gave her head a little shake to banish the foolish words with which she had

almost betrayed the confidence of her mother's communication, and reddened with alarm to think how near she had been to letting it all out.

'I am not going to——marry,' said Anne, in spite of herself, a little coldly, though she scarcely knew why, 'if that is what you want to know.'

'Then what,' said Rose, majestically, 'do you mean to do?'

The elder sister laughed a little. It was at the serious pertinacity of her questioner, who would not take an answer. 'I never knew you so curious before,' she said. 'One does not need to do anything all at once——'

'But what are you going to *do*?' said Rose. 'I never knew you so dull, Anne. Dear me, there are a great many things to do besides getting married. Has he just gone away for good, and is there an end of it? Or is he coming back again, or going to write to you, or what is going to happen? I know it can't be going to end like that; or what was the use of it at all?' the girl said, with some indignation. It was Rose's office to turn into prose all

Anne's romancings. She stopped short as they were walking, in the heat of indignant reason, and faced her sister, with natural eloquence, as all oratorical talkers do.

'It is not going to end,' said Anne, a shade of sternness coming over her face. She did not pause even for a moment, but went on softly with her abstracted look. Many a time before in the same abstraction had she escaped from her sister's questions; but Rose had never been so persistent as now.

'If you are not going to do anything, and it is not to end, I wonder what is going to happen,' said Rose. 'If it were me, I should know what I was to do.'

They were walking up and down on the green terrace where so many games had been played. It was getting almost too dark for the lime avenue when their talk had begun. The day had faded so far that the red of the geraniums had almost gone out; and light had come into the windows of the drawing-room, and appeared here and there over the house. The season had changed all in a day—a touch of autumn was in the air, and mist hung in

all the hollows. The glory of the year was over ; or so at least Anne thought.

‘And another thing,’ said Rose ; ‘are you going to tell anybody ? Mamma says I am not to tell ; but do you think it is right to go to the Meadowlands’ party, and go on talking and laughing with everybody just the same, and you an engaged girl ? Somebody else might fall in love with you ! I don’t think it is a right thing to do.’

‘People have not been in such a hurry to fall in love with me,’ said Anne ; ‘but, Rose, I don’t think this is a subject that mamma would think at all suited for you.’

‘Oh, mamma talked to me about it herself ; she said she wished you would give it up, Anne. She said it never could come to anything, for papa will never consent.’

‘Papa may never consent ; but yet it will come to something,’ said Anne, with a gleam in her eyes. ‘That is enough, Rose ; that is enough. I am going in, whatever you may do.’

‘But, Anne ! just one thing more ; if papa does

not consent, what *can* you do? Mamma says he could never afford to marry if you had nothing, and you would have nothing if papa refused. It is only *your* money that you would have to marry on; and if you had no money—— So what *could* you do?’

‘I wish, when mamma speaks of my affairs, she would speak to me,’ said Anne, with natural indignation. She was angry and indignant; and the words made, in spite of herself, a painful commotion within her. Money! what had money to do with it? She had felt the injustice, the wrong of her father’s threat; but it had not occurred to her that this could really have any effect upon her love; and though she had been annoyed to find that Cosmo would not treat the subject with seriousness, or believe in the gravity of Mr. Mountford’s menace, still she had been entirely satisfied that his apparent carelessness was the right way for him to consider it., He thought it of no importance, of course. He made jokes about it; laughed at it; beguiled her out of her gravity on the subject. Of course! what was it to him whether she was rich or poor; what

did Cosmo care? So long as she loved him, was not that all he was thinking of? What would she have minded had she been told that *he* had nothing? Not one straw—not one farthing! But when this little prose personage, with her more practical views of the question, rubbed against Anne, there did come to her, quite suddenly, a little enlightenment. It was like one chill, but by no means depressing, ray of daylight bursting in through a crevice into the land of dreams. If he had no money, and she no money, what then? Then, notwithstanding all generosity and nobleness of affection, money certainly would have something to do with it. It would count among the things to be taken into consideration; count dolefully, in so far as it would keep them apart; yet count with stimulating force as a difficulty to be surmounted, an obstacle to be got the better of. When Mrs. Mountford put her head out of the window, and called them to come in out of the falling dews, Anne went upstairs very seriously, and shut the door of her room, and sat down in her favourite chair to think it out. Fathers and mothers

are supposed to have an objection to long engagements ; but girls, at all events at the outset of their career, do not entertain the same objection. Anne was still in the dreamy condition of youthful rapture, transported out of herself by the new light that had come into the world, so that the indispensable sequence of marriage did not present itself to her as it does to the practical-minded. It was a barrier of fact with which, in the meantime, she had nothing to do. She was not disappointed or depressed, because *that* was not the matter in question. It would come in time, no doubt, as the afternoon follows the morning, and autumn summer, but who would change the delights of the morning for the warmer, steady glory of three o'clock ? though that also is very good in its way. She was quite resigned to the necessity of waiting, and not being married all at once. The contingency neither alarmed nor distressed her. Its immediate result was one which, indeed, most courses of thought produced in her mind at the present moment. If I had but thought of that, she said to herself, before he went away ! She

would have liked to talk over the money question with Cosmo ; to discuss it in all its bearings ; to hear him say how little it mattered, and to plan how they could do without it ; not absolutely without it, of course ; but Anne's active mind leaped at once at the thought of those systems of domestic economy which would be something quite new to study, which had not yet tempted her, but which would now have an interest such as no study ever had. And, on his side, there coulu be no doubt that the effort would be similar ; in all likelihood even now (if he had thought of it) he was returning with enthusiasm to his work, saying to himself, 'I have Anne to work for ; I have my happiness to win.'

*He could never afford to marry if you had nothing. It is only your money that you could marry on ; and if you had no money, what could you do ?'* Anne smiled to herself at Rose's wisdom ; nay, laughed in the silence, in the dark, all by herself, with an outburst of private mirth. Rose—prose, she said to herself, as she had said often before. How little that little thing knew ! but how could she know any

better, being so young, and with no experience ? The thrill of high exhilaration which had come to her own breast at the thought of this unperceived difficulty—the still higher impulse that no doubt had been given to Cosmo, putting spurs to his intellect, making impossibilities possible—a child like Rose could not understand those mysteries. By-and-by Anne reminded herself that, as the love of money was the root of all evil, so the want of it had been, not only no harm, but the greatest good. Painters, poets, people of genius of every kind had been stimulated by this wholesome prick. Had Shakespeare been rich ? She threw her head aloft with a smile of conscious energy, and capacity, and power. No money ! That would be the best way to make a life worth living. She faced all heroisms, all sacrifices, with a smile, and in a moment had gone through all the labours and privations of years. He, working so many hours at a stretch, bursting upon the world with the eloquence which was inspired by love and necessity ; she, making a shabby room into a paradise of content, working for him with her own

happy hands, carrying him through every despondency and difficulty. Good heavens! could any little idiot suppose that to settle down on a good income and never have any trouble would be half so delightful as this? Anne used strong language in the swelling of her breast.

It made her laugh with a little ridicule of herself, and a half sense that, if Rose's tendency was prose, hers might perhaps be heroics, when it occurred to her that Cosmo, instead of rushing back to his work, had only intended to catch the Scotch mail, and that he was going to the Highlands to shoot; while she herself was expected in Mrs. Worth's room to have her dress tried on for the Meadowlands' party. But, after all, what did that matter? There was no hurry; it was still the Long Vacation, in which no man can work, and in the meantime there was no economy for her to begin upon.

The maid whom she and Rose shared between them, and whose name was Keziah, came to the door to call her when she had reached this point.

‘Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Anne,’ she said, ‘I didn’t know you had no lights.’

‘They were quite unnecessary, thank you,’ said Anne, rising up out of her meditations, calmed, yet with all the force of this new stimulus to her thoughts.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE MEADOWLANDS' PARTY.

IT was a very large party—collected from all the quarters of England, or even it may be said of the globe, seeing there was a Russian princess and an American literary gentleman among the lists of the guests, as well as embracing the whole county, and everybody that had any claim to be affiliated into society there. Lady Meadowlands made a very liberal estimate of what could be called the society of the county—too liberal an estimate, many people thought. The clergy, everyone knows, must be present in force at every such function, and all their belongings, down to the youngest daughter who is out; but such a rule surely ought not to apply to country practitioners; and even to the brewer at Hunston, who, though he was rich, was nobody.

Upon that point almost everybody made a stand, and it is to be feared that Mrs. and Miss Brewer did not enjoy themselves at the Castle. But these were drawbacks not fully realised till afterwards. The people who were aggrieved by the presence of the brewer's family were those who themselves were not very sure of their standing, and who felt it was 'no compliment' to be asked when such persons were also acknowledged as within the mystic ring. Dr. Peacock's wife and Miss Woodhead were the ladies who felt it most; though poor Mr. Peacock himself was considered by some to be quite as great a blot. All the roads in the neighbourhood of the Castle were as gay as if there had been a fair going on. The village turned out bodily to see the carriages and horses of the quality; though these fine people themselves were perhaps less admired by the rustics than the beautiful tall footman in powder who had come from town with Lady Prayray Poule. But as every new arrival drove up, the excitement rose to a high pitch; even the soberest of people are moved by the sensation of multitude, the feeling of forming part of

a distinguished crowd. And the day was fine, with a sunny haze hanging about the distance, reddening the sun and giving a warm indistinctness to the sky. The grounds at Meadowlands were fine, and the park very extensive. The house was a modern and handsome house, and at some distance from it stood an old castle in ruins, which was the greatest attraction of the place. Upon the lawns a great many ‘games’ were going on. I have already said that I have no certainty as to whether the games were croquet or lawn-tennis, not knowing or remembering when the one period ended and the other began. But they were enough in either case to supply lively groups of young persons in pretty dresses, and afford a little gentle amusement to the lookers-on, especially when those lookers-on were the parents or relations of the performers. The Mountford party held a half-way place in the hierarchy of Lady Meadowlands’ guests. They were, as has been said, a very old family, though their want of wealth had for some time made them less desirable neighbours than it is pleasant for members of an old family to be. And though the

girls might, as was generally said, now ‘marry anybody,’ and consequently rise to any distinction, Mr. and Mrs. Mountford were not the kind of people whom it would have afforded the Princess Comatosky any pleasure to have presented to her, or who would have been looked upon as fine types of the English landed gentry by Mr. Greenwood, the American. But, on the other hand, they occupied a position very different from that of the rank and file, the people who, but for their professional position, would have had no right to appear in the heaven of county society at all. And Anne and Rose being pretty, and having the hope, one of a very good fortune, the other of a reasonable *dot*, were really in the first rank of young ladies without any drawbacks at all. Perhaps the reader will like to know what they wore on this interesting occasion. They were not dressed alike, as sisters so often are, without regard to individuality. After very serious thought, Mrs. Worth had decided that the roses of Rose wanted subduing, and had dressed her in Tussore silk, of the warm natural grass colour; while Anne, always much

more easy to dress, as that artist said, was in an ivory-tinted cashmere, very plain and simple, which did all that was wanted for her slim and graceful figure. Rose had flouncelets and puffings beyond mortal power to record. Anne was better without the foreign aid of ornament. I don't pretend to be so uninstructed as to require to describe a lady's dress as only of 'some soft white material.' It was cashmere, and why shouldn't one say so? For by this time a little autumn chill had set in, and even in the middle of the day it was no longer overpoweringly warm.

It is needless to say that the Ashleys were also there. These young men, though so constantly with the girls at home, had to relinquish their place a little when abroad, and especially when in more exalted company. Then it became apparent that Charley and Willie, though great friends, were not in any way of the same importance as Anne and Rose. They were not handsome, for one thing, or very clever or amusing—but only Charley and Willie Ashley, which was a title for friendship, but not for social

advancement. And especially were they separated from Anne, whose climax of social advancement came when she was presented to the Princess Comatosky, who admired her eyes and her dress, the latter being a most unusual compliment. There was a fashionable party assembled in the house besides all the county people, and the Miss Mountfords were swept away into this brilliant sphere and introduced to everybody. Rose was a little abashed at first, and looked back with anxious eyes at her mother, who was seated on the edge of that higher circle, but not within it; but she soon got confidence. Anne, however, who was not so self-possessed, was excited by the fine company. Her complexion, which was generally pale, took a faint glow, her eyes became so bright that the old Russian lady grew quite enthusiastic. ‘I like a handsome girl,’ she said; ‘bring her back once more to speak to me.’ Mr. Greenwood, the American, was of the same opinion. He was not at all like the American author of twenty years ago, before we knew the species. He spoke as little through his nose as the best of us, and his manners

were admirable. He was more refinedly English than an Englishman, more fastidious in his opposition to display and vulgarity, and his horror of loud tones and talk; and there was just a *nuance* of French politeness in his look and air. He was as exquisitely polite to the merest commoner as if he had been a crowned head, but at the same time it was one of the deepest certainties of his heart that he was only quite at home among people of title and in a noble house. Not all people of title: Mr. Greenwood had the finest discrimination and preferred at all times the best. But even he was pleased with Anne. ‘Miss Mountford is very inexperienced,’ he said, in his gentle way; ‘she does not know how to drop into a conversation or to drop out of it. Perhaps that is too fine an art to learn at twenty: but she is more like a lady than anyone else I see here.’ Lady Meadowlands, like most of the fashionable world, had a great respect for Mr. Greenwood’s opinion. ‘That is so much from you!’ she said gratefully; ‘and if you give her the advantage of seeing a little of you, it will do dear Anne the greatest good.’ Mr. Green-

wood shook his head modestly, deprecating the possibility of conferring so much advantage, but he felt in his heart that it was true.

Thus Anne, for the first time in her life, had what may be called a veritable *succès*. We may perhaps consider the word naturalised by this time and call it a success. There was a certain expansion and brightening of all her faculties consequent upon the new step she had taken in life, of which no one had been conscious before, and the state of opposition in which she found herself to her family had given her just as much emancipation as became her, and gave force to all her attractions. She was not beautiful perhaps, nor would she have satisfied a critical examination; but both her face and figure had a certain nobility of line which impressed the spectator. Tall and light, and straight and strong, with nothing feeble or drooping about her, the girlish shyness to which she had been subject was not becoming to Anne. Rose, who was not shy, might have drooped her head as much as she pleased, but it did not suit her sister. And the fact that she

had judged for herself, had chosen her own path, and made up her own mind, and more or less defied Fate and her father, had given just the inspiration it wanted to her face. She was shy still, which gave her a light and shade, an occasional gleam of timidity and alarm, which pleased the imagination. ‘I told you Anne Mountford would come out if she had the chance,’ Lady Meadowlands said to her lord. ‘What is this nonsense I hear about an engagement? Is there an engagement? What folly! before she has seen anybody or had any chance, as you say,’ said Lord Meadowlands to his lady. They were interested in Anne, and she was beyond question the girl who did them most credit of all their country neighbours, which also told for something in its way.

The Rev. Charles Ashley, in his most correct clerical coat, and a general starch of propriety about him altogether unlike the ease of his ordinary appearance, looked on from afar at this brilliant spectacle, but had not much share in it. Had there been anybody there who could have been specially of use to Charley—the new bishop for instance, who

did not yet know his clergy, or the patron of a good living, or an official concerned with the Crown patronage, anyone who could have lent him a helping hand in his profession—no doubt Lady Meadowlands would have taken care to introduce the curate and speak a good word for him. But there being nobody of the kind present, Charley was left with the mob to get up a game on his own account and amuse the young ladies who were unimportant, who made up the mass of the assembly. And the young Ashleys both accepted this natural post, and paid such harmless attentions as were natural to the wives and daughters of other clergymen, and the other people whom they knew. They had no desire to be introduced to the Princess, or the other great persons who kept together, not knowing the county. But, while Willie threw himself with zeal into the amusements and the company provided, the curate kept his eyes upon the one figure, always at a distance, which was the chief point of interest for him.

‘I want to speak to Anne,’ he said to Rose, who was less inaccessible, who had not had so great a

success ; ‘if you see Anne, will you tell her I want to speak to her ?’

‘Anne, Charley wants to speak to you,’ Rose said, as soon as she had an opportunity, in the hearing of everybody ; and Anne turned and nodded with friendly assent over the chairs of the old ladies. But she did not make any haste to ask what he wanted. She took it with great ease, as not calling for any special attention. There would be abundant opportunities of hearing what Charley had to say. On the way home she could ask him what he wanted ; or while they were waiting for the carriage ; or even to-morrow, when he was sure to come to talk over the party, would no doubt be time enough. It would be something about the schools, or some girl or boy who wanted a place, or some old woman who was ill. ‘Anne, Charley says he *must* speak to you,’ said Rose again. But it was not till after she had received a third message that Anne really gave any attention to the call. ‘Cannot he tell you what he wants ?—I will come as soon as I can,’ she said. Perhaps the curate was not so much distressed as he

thought he was by her inattention. He watched her from a distance with his hands in his pockets. When he was accosted by other clergymen and country friends who were wandering about he replied to them, and even carried on little conversations with his eyes upon her. Something grim and humorous, a kind of tender spitefulness, was in the look with which he regarded her. If she only knew! But it was her own fault if she did not know, not his. It gave him a kind of pleasure to see how she lingered, to perceive that her mind was fully occupied, and that she never divined the nature of his business with her. So far as his own action went he had done his duty, but he could not help a half chuckle, quickly suppressed, when he imagined within himself how Douglas would look if he saw how impossible it was to gain Anne's attention. Did that mean, he asked in spite of himself, that after all she was not so much interested? Charley had felt sure that at the first word Anne would divine. '*I should divine if a note of hers was on its way to me,*' he said to himself—and it pleased him that she

never guessed that a letter from Cosmo was lying safe in the recesses of his pocket. When she came hastily towards him at last, a little breathless and hurried, and with only a moment to spare, there was no consciousness in Anne's face.

'What is it?' she said—before the Woodheads! She would have said it before anybody, so entirely unsuspecting was she. 'I must go back to the old lady,' she added, with a little blush and smile, pleased in spite of herself by the distinction; 'but Rose told me you wanted me. Tell me what it is.'

He made elaborate signs to her with his eyebrows, and motions recommending precaution with his lips—confounding Anne completely. For poor Charley had heavy eyebrows, and thick lips, and his gestures were not graceful. She stared at him in unfeigned astonishment, and then, amused as well as bewildered, laughed. He enjoyed it all, though he pretended to be disconcerted. She looked as bright as ever, he said to himself. There was no appearance of trouble about her, or of longing uncertainty. She laughed just as of old, with that

pleasant ring in the laughter which had always charmed him. The temptation crossed the curate's mind, as she did not seem to want it, as she looked so much like her old self, as she showed no perception of what he had for her, to put the letter down a little deeper in his pocket, and not disturb her calm at all.

'Oh yes,' he said, as if he had suddenly recollected, 'it was something I wanted to show you. Come down this path a little. You seem to be enjoying the party, Anne.'

'Yes, well enough. It is pretty,' she said, glancing over the pretty lawns covered with gaily-dressed groups. 'Are *you* not enjoying yourself? I am so sorry. But you know everybody, or almost everybody here.'

'Except your grand people,' he said, with some malice.

'My grand people! They are all nice whether they are grand or not, and the old lady is very funny. She has all kinds of strange old ornaments and crosses and charms mixed together. What is it,

Charley? you are looking so serious, and I must go back as soon as I am able. Tell me what it is.'

'Can't you divine what it is?' he said, with an air half reproachful, half triumphant.

She looked at him astonished; and then, suddenly taking fire from his look, her face kindled into colour and expectation and wondering eagerness. Poor curate! he had been pleased with her slowness to perceive, but he was not so pleased now when her whole countenance lighted under his eyes. He in his own person could never have brought any such light into her face. She opened her mouth as if to speak, then stood eager, facing him with the words arrested on her very lips.

'Is it a message from—' She paused, and a wave of scarlet came over her face up to her hair. Poor Charley Ashley! There was no want of the power to divine now. His little pleasant spitefulness, and his elation over what he considered her indifference, died in the twinkling of an eye.

'It is more than a message,' he said, thinking what an ass he was to doubt her, and what a traitor

to be delighted by that doubt. ‘It is—a letter, Anne.’

She did not say anything—the colour grew deeper and deeper upon her face, the breath came quickly from her parted lips, and without a word she put out her hand.

Yes, of course, that was all—to give it her, and be done with it—what had he to do more with the incident? No honourable man would have wished to know more. To give it to her and to withdraw. It was nothing to him what was in the letter. He had no right to criticise. In the little bitterness which this feeling produced in him he wanted to say what, indeed, he had felt all along: that though he did not mind *once*, it would not suit his office to be the channel through which their communications were to flow. He *wanted* to say this now, whereas before he had only felt that he ought to say it; but in either case, under the look of Anne’s eyes, poor Charley could not say it. He put his hand in his pocket to get the letter, and of course he forgot in which pocket he had put it, and then became red

and confused, as was natural. Anne for her part did not change her attitude. She stood with that look of sudden eagerness in her face—a blush that went away, leaving her quite pale, and then came back again—and her hand held out for the letter. How hot, how wretched he got, as he plunged into one pocket after another, with her eyes looking him through! ‘Anne,’ he stammered, when he found it at last, ‘I beg your pardon—I am very glad—to be of—any use. I like to do anything, anything for you! but—I am a clergyman—’

‘Oh, go away—please go away,’ said Anne. She had evidently paid no attention to what he said. She put him away even, unconsciously, with her hand. ‘Don’t let anyone come,’ she said, walking away from him round the next corner of the path. Then he heard her tear open the envelope. She had not paid any attention to his offer of service, but she had made use of it all the same, taking it for granted. The curate turned his back to her and walked a few steps in the other direction. She had told him not to let anyone come, and he would

not let anyone come. He would have walked any intruders backward out of the sacred seclusion. Yet there he stood dumbfounded, wounded, wondering why it was that Cosmo should have so much power and he so little. Cosmo got everything he wanted. To think that Anne's face should change like that at his mere name, nay, at the merest suggestion of him! —it was wonderful. But it was hard too.

Anne's heart was in her mouth as she read the letter. She did not take time to think about it, nor how it came there, nor of any unsuitableness in the way it reached her. It was to ask how they were to correspond, whether he was to be permitted to write to her. 'I cannot think why we did not settle this before I left,' Cosmo said; 'I suppose the going away looked so like dying that nothing beyond it, except coming back again, seemed any alleviation.' But this object of the letter did not strike Anne at first. She was unconscious of everything except the letter itself, and those words which she had never seen on paper in handwriting before. She had read something like it in books. Nothing but books

could be the parallel of what was happening to her. ‘My dear and only love,’ that was in a poem somewhere Anne was certain, but Cosmo did not quote it out of any poem. It was the natural language; that was how she was to be addressed now, like Juliet. She had come to that state and dignity all at once, in a moment, without any doing of hers. She stood alone, unseen, behind the great tuft of bushes, while the curate kept watch lest anyone should come to disturb her, and all the old people sat round unseen, chatting and eating ices, while the young ones fluttered about the lawns. Nobody suspected with what a sudden, intense, and wondering perception of all the emotions she had fallen heir to, she stood under the shadow of the rhododendrons reading her letter; and nobody knew with what a sore but faithful heart the curate stood, turning his back to her, and protected her seclusion. It was a scene that was laughable, comical, pathetic, but pathetic more than all.

This incident coloured the whole scene to Anne, and gave it its character. She had almost forgotten

the very existence of the old Princess when she went back. ‘Bring me that girl,’ the old lady said, in her excellent English, ‘bring me back that girl. She is the one I prefer. All the others they are demoiselles, but this is a woman.’ But when Anne was brought back at last the keen old lady saw the difference at once. ‘Something has happened,’ she said; ‘what has happened, my all-beautiful? someone has been making you a proposal of marriage. That comes of your English customs which you approve so much. To me it is intolerable; imagine a man having the permission in society to startle this child with an *emotion* like that.’ She pronounced *emotion* and all similar words as if they had been in the French language. Anne protested vainly that no such emotion had fallen to her share. Mr. Greenwood agreed with the Princess, though he did not express himself so frankly. Could it be the curate? he thought, elevating his eyebrows. He was a man of experience, and knew how the most unlikely being is sometimes gifted to produce such an emotion in the fairest bosom.

## CHAPTER IX.

COSMO.

IT is time to let the reader of this story know who Cosmo Douglas was, whose appearance had made so great a commotion at Mount. He was—nobody. This was a fact that Mr. Mountford had very soon elicited by his inquiries. He did not belong to any known house of Douglasses under the sun. It may be said that there was something fair in Cosmo's frank confession on this point, put perhaps it would be more true to say that it showed the good sense which was certainly one of his characteristics; for any delusion that he might have encouraged or consented to in this respect must have been found out very shortly, and it would only have been to his discredit to claim good connections which did not belong to him. ‘Honesty is the best policy’ he had

said to himself, and therefore he had been honest. Nevertheless it was a standing mystery to Cosmo that he was nobody. He could not understand it. It had been a trouble to him all his life. How was he inferior to the other people who had good connections? He had received the same kind of education, he had the same kind of habits, he was as much a 'gentleman,' that curious English distinction which means everything and nothing, as any of them. He did not even feel within himself the healthy thrill of opposition with which the lowly born sometimes scorn the supposed superiority of blue blood. He for his part had something in his heart which entirely coincided with that superstition. Instinctively he preferred for himself that his friends should be well born. He had as natural a predilection that way as if his shield held ever so many quarterings; and it was terrible to know that he had no right to any shield at all. In his boyhood he had accepted the crest which his father wore at his watch-chain, and had stamped upon his spoons and forks, with undoubting faith, as if it had descended straight

from the Crusaders ; and when he had read of the ‘dark grey man’ in early Scotch history, and of that Lord James who carried Bruce’s heart to the Holy Land, there was a swell of pride within him, and he had no doubt that they were his ancestors. But as he grew older it dawned upon Cosmo that his father had assumed the bleeding heart because he found it represented in the old book of heraldry as the cognisance of the Douglasses, and not because he had any hereditary right to it—and, indeed, the fact was that good Mr. Douglas knew no better. He thought in all simplicity that his name entitled him to the symbol which was connected with the name, and that all those great people so far off from the present day were ‘no doubt’ his ancestors, though it was too far back to be able to tell.

Mr. Douglas himself was a man of the highest respectability. He was the managing clerk in a solicitor’s office, with a good salary, and the entire confidence of his employers. Perhaps he might even have been a partner had he been of a bolder temper ; but he was afraid of responsibility, and had

no desire, he said, to assume a different position, or rise in the social scale. That would be for Cosmo, he added, within himself. He had lost his wife at a very early period, when Cosmo was still a child, and upon the boy all his father's hopes were built. He gave him 'every advantage.' For himself he lived very quietly in a house with a garden out Hampstead way, a small house capable of being managed by one respectable woman-servant, who had been with him for years, and a young girl under her, or sometimes a boy, when she could be persuaded to put up with one of these more objectionable creatures. But Cosmo had everything that was supposed to be best for an English young man. He was at Westminster School, and so received into the fraternity of 'public school men,' which is a distinct class in England ; and then he went to the University. When he took his degree he studied for the bar. Both at Oxford and Lincoln's Inn he was 'in for' all his examinations in company with the son of his father's employer ; but it was Cosmo who was the most promising student always, and the most popular man. He

had the air and the bearing, the ‘je ne sais quoi’ which is supposed to indicate ‘family,’ though he was of no family. Nothing ever was more perplexing. He could not understand it himself. What was it that made this wonderful difference? When he looked at Charley Ashley a smile would sometimes steal over his countenance. In that point of view the prejudice certainly showed its full absurdity. Charley was his retainer, his faithful follower—his dog, in a way. But Mr. Mountford, though he would probably have thought Charley not a suitable match for his daughter, would not have looked upon him with the same puzzled air as on a creature of a different species, with which he regarded the suitor who was nobody. When this contrast struck him, no doubt Cosmo smiled with a little bitterness. Charley had connections among all the little squires of the district. He had an uncle here and there whose name was in some undistinguished list or other—the ‘Gentry of Great Britain’ or some other such bead-roll. But Cosmo had no link at all to the classes who consider themselves the natural masters of the world.

If you will think of it, it was as troublesome and unpleasant a position as could be conceived—to have all that makes a gentleman and to be a gentleman, fully considered and received as such, yet upon close investigation to be found to be nobody, and have all your other qualities ignored in consequence. It was hard—it was a complicating, perplexing grievance, such as could only occur in the most artificial state of society. In the middle ages, if a man ‘rose,’ it was by dint of hard blows, and people were afraid of him. But ‘rising in the world’ had a very different meaning in Cosmo’s case. He had always known what it was to be carefully tended, daintily fed, clothed with the best of clothes—as well as a duke’s son need have been. He had all the books to read which any duke’s son could have set his face to ; and though the Hampstead rooms were small, and might have looked poky had there been a family cooped up in them, Cosmo and his father had felt no want of space nor of comfort. Even that little Hampstead house was now a thing of the past. Mr. Douglas had died, though still not much beyond

middle age, and Cosmo had his chambers, like any other young barrister, and several clubs, and all the ‘advantages’ which his father had sworn he should have. He had a little money, and a little practice, and was ‘getting on.’ If he was not in fashionable society, he was yet in an excellent ‘set’—rising barristers, literary people, all rising too, people of reputation, people who suppose themselves to sway the world, and who certainly direct a great deal of its public talk, and carry a large silent background of its population with them. He was very well thought of among this class, went out a great deal into society, knew a great many people whom it is supposed something to know—and yet he was nobody. The merest clown could have confused him at any time by asking, ‘Which is your county, Douglas?’ Poor Cosmo had no county. He took the deficiency admirably, it is needless to say, and never shirked the truth when there was any need to tell it. In the majority of cases it was not at all necessary to tell it; but yet his friends knew well enough that he had no relations to give him shooting,

or ask him during the hunting season ; no district had any claim upon him, nor he upon it. A man may love his home when it has never been anywhere but in Hampstead. But it makes a great difference—even when his friends make up the deficiencies of family to him, and invite him, as he had this year been invited, to share the delights of a Scotch moor—still it makes a great difference. And when it is a matter of matrimony, and of producing his proofs of gentility, and of being a fit person to marry Anne Mountford, then the difference shows most of all

When Cosmo attained that perfect freedom from all ties, and power of roaming wherever he pleased, without any clog to draw him back, which was involved in his father's death (though it may be said for him that this was an event which he deeply regretted) he made up his mind that he would not marry, at least until he had reached sufficient distinction in his profession to make him somebody, quite independent of connections. But then he had not seen Anne Mountford. With her, without any

secondary motives, he had fallen honestly and heartily in love, a love which he would, however, have managed to quench and get the better of, had it not turned out upon inquiry that Anne was one whom it was entirely permissible to love, and who could help him, not hold him back in the career of success. He had, however, many discussions with himself before he permitted himself to indulge his inclinations. He had felt that with people like the Mountfords the fact that he was nobody would tell with double power; and, indeed, if he had ever been tempted to invent a family of Douglasses of Somewhere-or-other, it was now. He had almost been led into doing this. He had even half-prepared a little romance, which no doubt Mr. Mountford, he thought, would have swallowed, of a ruined house dwindled away to its last representative, which had lost lands and even name in one of the rebellions. He had not chosen which rebellion, but he had made up the story otherwise with great enjoyment and a fine sense of its fitness: when that modern quality, which for want of a better name we call a

sense of humour stopped him. For a man of his time, a man of his enlightened opinions, a member of a liberal profession, a high-bred (if not high-born) Englishman to seek importance from a silly little school-girl romance was too absurd. He could not do it. He laughed aloud at himself with a little flush of shame on his countenance, and tossed away the fiction. But what a thing it would have been for Cosmo if the tumbledown old house which he had invented and the bit of school-girl fiction had been true! They became almost such to him, so strongly did he feel that they would exactly fit his case. ‘They would have been as stupid probably as—Mr. Mountford,’ Cosmo said to himself, ‘and pig-headed into the bargain, or they never would have thrown away everything for a gingerbread adventurer like Prince Charley—rude Lowland rustics talking broad Scotch, not even endowed with the mystery of Gaelic. But to be sure I might have made them Celts, and the Lord of Mount would not have been a whit the wiser. I think I can see a snuffy old laird in a blue bonnet, and a lumbering

young lout scratching his red head. And these be your gods, oh Israel! I don't think I should have been much the better of such ancestors.' But nevertheless he felt in his heart that he would have been much the better for them. Other men might despise them, but Cosmo would have liked to believe in those Douglasses who had never existed. However, though he had invented them, he could not make use of them. It would have been too absurd. He laughed and reddened a little, and let them drop; and with a perfectly open and composed countenance informed Mr. Mountford that he was nobody and sprang from no known Douglasses at all. It was a kind of heroism in its way, the heroism of good sense, the influence of that wholesome horror of the ridiculous which is one of the strongest agencies of modern life.

After the interview with Mr. Mountford, and after the still greater shock of Anne's intimation that her father would not yield, Cosmo's mind had been much exercised, and there had been a moment in which he had not known what to do or say. Marriage with-

out pecuniary advantage was impossible to him—he could not, he dared not think of it. It meant downfall of every kind, and a narrowing of all the possibilities of life. It would be ruin to him and also to the girl who should be his wife. It would be impossible for him to keep her in the position she belonged to, and he would have to relinquish the position which belonged to him—two things not for a moment to be thought of. The only thing possible, evidently, was to wait. He was in love, but he was not anxious to marry at once. In any case it would be expedient to defer that event; and the old man might die—nay, most likely would die—and would not certainly change his will if all things were kept quiet and no demonstration made. He left Mount full of suppressed excitement, yet glad to be able to withdraw; to go away without compromising Anne, without being called upon to confront or defy the harsh parent, or do anything to commit himself. If Anne but held her tongue, there was no reason why Mr. Mountford might not suppose that she had given Cosmo up, and Cosmo was rather pleased than

otherwise with the idea that she might do so. He wanted no sentimental passion; no sacrifice of everything for his sake. All for love and the world well lost, was not in the least a sentiment which commended itself to him. He would have much preferred that she had dissembled altogether, and put on an appearance of obeying her father; but this was a thing that he could not recommend her to do, any more than he could put forth his invented story of the ruined Douglasses. The fashion of his age and his kind and his education was so against lying, that it could be practised only individually, so to speak, and as it were accidentally. You might be betrayed into it by the emergency of a moment, but you could not, unless you were very sure indeed of your ground and your coadjutor, venture to suggest falsehood. The thing could not be done. This, however, was what he would have thought the safest thing—that all should fall back into its usual state; that Anne should go on as if she were still simply Anne, without any difference in her life; and that, except for the fine but concealed bond between

them, which should be avowed on the first possible occasion, but never made any display of while things were not ripe, everything should be exactly as before. This was perfectly fair in love, according to all known examples and rules. Something like it had happened in the majority of similar cases, and indeed, Cosmo said to himself with a half smile, a lover might feel himself little flattered for whom such a sacrifice would not be made. But all the same he could not suggest it. He could not say to Anne, ‘Tell a lie for me—persuade your father that all is over between us, though it is not all over between us and never shall be till death parts us.’ A young man of the nineteenth century, brought up at a public school and university, a member of the bar, and in very good society, could not say that. It would have been an anachronism. He might wish it, and did do so fervently; but to put it in words was impossible.

It was with this view, however, that Cosmo had emitted all mention of correspondence in his last interviews with Anne. They were full of so much

that was novel and exciting to her that she did not notice the omission, nor in the hurry and rush of new sensations in her mind had she that eager longing for a letter which most girls would have felt on parting with their lovers. She had no habit of letters. She had never been at school or made any friendships of the kind that need to be solaced by continual outpourings upon paper. Almost all her intimates were about her, seeing her often, not standing in need of correspondence. She had not even said in the hurry of parting, ‘ You will write.’ Perhaps she saw it like himself, but like himself was unwilling to propose the absolute concealment which was desirable. Cosmo’s mind had been full of nothing else on his way to Scotland to his friend’s moor. He had thought of her half the time, and the other half of the time he had thought how to manage, how to secure her without injuring her (which was how he put it); the long night’s journey was made short to him by these thoughts. He did not sleep, and he did not want to sleep; the darkness of the world through which he was rushing, the

jumble of perpetual sound, which made a sort of atmosphere about him, was as a hermitage to Cosmo, as it has been to many before him. Railway trains, indeed, are hermitages in life for the much-pondering and careworn sons of the present age. There they can shut themselves up and think at will. He turned it all over and over in his mind. No wild notion—such as had moved the inexperienced mind of Anne with a thrill of delightful impulse—of rushing back to work and instantly beginning the toil which was to win her, occurred to Anne's lover. To be sure it was the long vacation, which is a thing girls do not take into account, and Cosmo would have smiled at the notion of giving up his shooting and going back to his chambers out of the mere sentiment of losing no time, which probably would have appeared to Anne a heroic and delightful idea; but he did what Anne could not have done; he went into the whole question, all the *pros* and *cons*, and weighed them carefully. He had a long journey, far up into the wilds, by the Highland railway. Morning brought him into the land of

hills and rivers, and noon to the bleaker mountains and glens, wealthy only in grouse and deer. He did nothing but think it over in the night and through the day. Nevertheless, Cosmo, when he reached Glentuan, was as little worn out as it becomes an experienced young Englishman to be after a long journey. He was quite fresh for dinner after he had performed the customary rites—ready to take his part in all the conversation and help in the general amusement.

‘Douglas—which of the Douglasses does he belong to?’ one of the guests asked after he had withdrawn.

‘I’ve always known him as Douglas of Trinity,’ said the host.

‘Trinity, Trinity,’ answered the other, who was a local personage, thinking of nothing but territorial designation, ‘I never heard of any Douglasses of Trinity. Do you mean the place near Edinburgh where all the seaside villas are?’

‘He means Cambridge,’ said another, laughing.

‘ Douglas is the best fellow in the world, but he is—nobody: at least so I’ve always heard.’

Cosmo did not overhear this conversation, but he knew that it had taken place as well as if he had heard it; not that it did him the least harm with his comrades of the moment, to whom he was a very nice fellow, a capital companion, thoroughly acquainted with all the habits and customs of their kind, and though no great shot, yet good enough for all that was necessary, good enough to enjoy the sport, which nobody who is awkward and really ignorant can do. But he knew that one time or other this little conversation would take place, and though he felt that he might do himself the credit to say that he had no false shame, nor attached any exaggerated importance to the subject, still it was no doubt of more importance to him than it was to those with whom it was only one out of many subjects of a casual conversation. All the same, however, even these casual talkers did not forget it. Strange superstition, strangest folly, he might well say to himself with such a smile as was possible in

the circumstances. Douglas of Trinity—Douglas of Lincoln's Inn meant something—but to be one of the Douglasses of some dilapidated old house, what did that mean? This question, however, had nothing to do with the matter, and the smile had not much pleasantness in it, as may easily be perceived.

The fruit of Cosmo's cogitations, however, was that he wrote to Anne, as has been seen, and sent his letter to Charley Ashley to be delivered. This was partly policy and partly uncertainty, a sort of half measure to feel his way; but, on the whole, was most of all the necessity he felt to say something to her, to seize upon her, not to let this beautiful dream escape from him.

'We said nothing about writing, and I don't know, my dearest, what you wish in this respect. Silence seems impossible, but if you wish it, if you ask this sacrifice, I will be content with my perfect trust in my Anne, and do whatever she would have me do. I know that it would be against your pride and your delicacy, my darling, to keep up any correspondence

which the severest parent could call clandestine, and if I take advantage of a good fellow who is devoted to us both, for once, it is not with the least idea that you will like it, or will allow me to continue it. But what can I do? I must know what is your will in this matter, and I must allow myself the luxury once, if only once, of telling you on paper what I have tried to tell you so often in words—how I love you, my love, and what it is to me to love you—a new creation, an opening up both of earth and heaven.' (We need not continue what Cosmo said on this point because, to be sure, it has all been said over and over again, sometimes no doubt worse, and sometimes unquestionably a great deal better, than he said it: and there is no advantage that we know of to be got from making young persons prematurely acquainted with every possible manner in which this sentiment can be expressed.) At the end he resumed, with generous sentiment, which was perfectly genuine, and yet not any more free of calculation and the idea of personal advantage than all the rest was:—

‘Charley Ashley is the truest friend that ever man had; he has loved you all his life (*that* is nothing wonderful), and yet, though, at such a cost as I do not like to try to estimate, he still loves me, though he knows that I have come between him and any possibility there was that he should ever win any return from you. To do him full justice, I do not think he ever looked for any return, but was content to love you as in itself a happiness and an elevation for which a man might well be grateful; but still it is hard upon him to see a man no better than himself, nay, less worthy in a hundred ways, winning the unimaginable reward for which he, poor Charley, had not so much as ventured to hope. Yet with a generosity—how can I express it, how could I ever have emulated it?—which is beyond words, he has neither withdrawn his brotherly kindness from me, nor refused to stand by me in my struggle towards you and happiness. What can we say to a friend like this? Trust him, my dearest, as I do. I do not mean that he should be the medium of communication between us, but there are

ways in which he may be of help and comfort to us both ; and, in the meantime, you will at your dear pleasure tell me yourself what you wish to do, or let me know by him : if I may write, if I must be silent, if you will make me a happy man now and then by a word from your [hand, or if I am to wait for that hand till I dare claim it as mine. Nay, but my Anne, my darling, for once, if for once only, you must send two or three words, a line or two, to give me patience and hope.'

As he folded this up his whole heart longed for the 'word or two' he had asked for. Without that it almost seemed to him that all that had passed before might mean nothing, might roll away like the mists, like the fabric of a vision. But at the same time Cosmo felt in his heart that if Anne would send him the consolation of this one letter through Charley Ashley, and after that bid him be silent and wait for chance opportunities or modes of communication, that she would do well. It was what he would have advised her to do had he been free to tell her exactly what he thought. But he was not

free to advise such a proceeding. It was not in his rôle; nor could he have proposed any clandestine correspondence, though he would have liked it. It was impossible. Anne would most probably have thrown him off as altogether unworthy had he proposed anything of the kind to her, or at least would have regarded him with very different eyes from those with which she looked upon him now. And even independent of this he could not have done it: the words would have failed him to make such a proposal. It was contrary to all tradition, and to the spirit of his class and time.

When he had despatched this letter Cosmo's bosom's lord sat more lightly upon his throne. He went out next morning very early and made a respectable, a very respectable, bag. Nobody could say that he was a cockney sportsman not knowing how to aim or hold a gun. In this as in everything else he had succeeded in mastering the rules of every fashion, and lived as a man who was to the manner born. He was indeed to the manner born, with nothing in him, so far as he was aware, that went against the traditions

of a gentleman ; and yet similar conversations to that one which occurred in the smoking-room, occurred occasionally on the hills among the heather. ‘ Of what Douglasses is your friend ? ’ ‘ Oh, I don’t know that he is of any Douglasses,’ the master of ihe moor would say with impatience. ‘ He is a capital fellow, and a rising man in the law—that’s all I know about him ; ’ or else, ‘ He is a college friend, a man who took a very good degree, as clever a fellow as you will meet with, and getting on like a house on fire.’ But all these recommendations, as they all knew, were quite beside the question. He was of nowhere in particular—he was nobody. It was a mysterious dispensation, altogether unexplainable, that such a man should have come into the world without suitable ancestors who could have responded for him. But he had done so. And he could not even produce that fabulous house which, as he had invented it, was a far prettier and more truly gentle and creditable family than half the families who would have satisfied every question. Thus the very best quality of his age was against

him as well as its superstitions. Had he been an enriched grocer to whom it could have done no possible good, he might easily have invented a pedigree; but being himself he could not do it. And thus the injury he had sustained at the hands of Providence was beyond all remedy or hope of amendment.

## CHAPTER X.

## FAMILY COUNSELS.

‘ HAS Anne spoken to you all on the subject—what does she intend to do ? ’

Mr. Mountford was subjecting his wife to a cross-examination as to the affairs of the household. It was a practice he had. He felt it to be beneath his dignity to inquire into these details in his own person, but he found them out through her. He was not a man who allowed his authority to be shared. So far as ordering the dinner went and regulating the household bills, he was content to allow that she had a mission in the world ; but everything of greater importance passed through his hands. Mrs. Mountford was in the habit of expressing her extreme satisfaction with this rule, especially in respect to Anne. ‘ What could I have done with a stubborn

girl like that? she would have worn me out. The relief that it is to feel that she is in her father's hands and not in mine!' she was in the habit of saying. But, though she was free of the responsibility, she was not without trouble in the matter. She had to submit to periodical questioning, and, if she had been a woman of fine susceptibilities, would have felt herself something like a spy upon Anne. But her susceptibilities were not fine, and the discussion of other people which her husband's inquisitions made necessary was not disagreeable to her. Few people find it altogether disagreeable to sit in a secret tribunal upon the merits and demerits of those around them. Sometimes Mrs. Mountford would rebel at the closeness of the examination to which she was subjected, but on the whole she did not dislike it. She was sitting with her husband in that business-room of his which could scarcely be dignified by the name of a library. She had her usual worsted work in her hand, and a wisp of skeins plaited together in various bright colours on a table before her. Sometimes she would pause to count

one, two, three, of the stitches on her canvas ; her head was bent over it, which often made it more easy to say what she had got to say. A serious truth may be admitted, or censure conveyed, in the soft sentence which falls from a woman's lips with an air of having nothing particular in it, when the one, two, three, of the Berlin pattern, the exact shade of the wool, is evidently the primary subject in her mind. Mrs. Mountford felt and employed to the utmost the shield of her work. It made everything more easy, and took away all tedium from these prolonged conversations. As for Mr. Mountford, there was always a gleam of expectation in his reddish hazel eyes. Whether it was about a servant, or his children, or even an indifferent person in the parish, he seemed to be always on the verge of finding something out. ‘What does she intend to do ?’ he repeated. ‘She has never mentioned the subject again, but I suppose she has talked it over with you.’

‘Something has been said,’ answered his wife ; ‘to say that she had talked it over with me would

not be true, St. John. Anne is not one to talk over anything with anybody, especially me. But something was said. I confess I thought it my duty, standing in the place of a mother to her, to open the subject.'

'And what is she going to do?'

'You must know very little about girls, St. John, though you have two of your own (and one of them as difficult to deal with as I ever encountered), if you think that all that is wanted in order to know what they are going to do is to talk it over with them—it is not so easy as that.'

'I suppose you heard something about it, however,' he said, with a little impatience. 'Does she mean to give the fellow up? that is the chief thing I want to know.'

'I never knew a girl yet that gave a fellow up, as you call it, because her father told her,' said Mrs. Mountford: and then she paused, hesitating between two shades; 'that blue is too blue, it will never go with the others. I must drive into Hunston to-day or to-morrow, and see if I cannot get a better

match.—As for giving up, that was not spoken of, St. John. Nobody ever believes in it coming to that. They think you will be angry ; but that of course, if they stand out, you will come round at the last.'

' Does Anne think that ? She must know very little of me if she thinks that I will come round at the last.'

' They all think it,' said Mrs. Mountford, calmly counting the lines of the canvas with her needle : ' I am not speaking only of Anne. I daresay she counts upon it less than most do, for it must be allowed that she is very like you, St. John, and as obstinate as a mule. You have to be very decided indeed before a girl will think you mean it. Why, there is Rose. What I say is not blaming Anne, for I am a great deal more sure what my own child would think than what Anne would think. Rose would no more believe that you would cross her seriously in anything she wanted than she would believe you could fly if you tried. She would cry outwardly, I don't doubt, but she would smile in her

heart. She would say to herself, “Papa go against me ‘impossible!’” and the little puss would look very pitiful and submissive, and steal her arms round your neck and coax you, and impose upon you. You would be more than mortal, St. John, if you did not come round at the end.’

Mr. Mountford’s countenance relaxed while this description was made—an almost imperceptible softening crept about the corners of his mouth. He seemed to feel the arms of the little puss creeping round his neck, and her pretty little rosebud face close to his own. But he shook off the fascination abruptly, and frowned to make his wife think him insensible to it. ‘I hope I am not such a weak fool,’ he said. ‘And there is not much chance that Anne would try that way,’ he added, with some bitterness. Rose was supposed to be his favourite child, but yet he resented the fact that no such confession of his absolute authority and homage to his power was to be looked for from Anne. Mrs. Mountford had no deliberate intention of presenting his eldest daughter to him under an unfavourable light, but if she wished him to perceive

the superior dutifulness and sweetness of her own child, could anyone wonder? Rose had been hardly used by Nature. She ought to have been a boy and the heir of entail, or, if not so, she ought to have had a brother to take that position, and protect her interests; and neither of these things had happened. That her father should love her best and do all in his will that it was possible to do for her, was clearly Rose's right as compensation for the other injustices of fate.

'No,' said Mrs. Mountford, after a longer piece of mental arithmetic than usual, 'that is not Anne's way; but still you must do Anne justice, St. John. She will never believe, any more than Rose, that you will go against her. I don't say this from anything she has said to me. Indeed, I cannot say that she has spoken to me at all on the subject. It was I that introduced it; I thought it my duty.'

'And she gave you to understand that she would go on with it, whatever I might say; and that, like an old fool, if she stuck to it, I would give in at the end?'

‘St. John ! St. John ! how you do run away with an idea ! I never said that, nor anything like it. I told you what, judging from what I know of girls, I felt sure Anne must feel. They never dream of any serious opposition : as we have given in to them from their childhood, they think we will continue to give in to them to the end ; and I am sure it is quite reasonable to think so ; only recollect how often we have yielded, and done whatever they pleased.’

‘This time she will find that I will not yield,’ said Mr. Mountford, getting up angrily, and planting himself in front of the polished fireplace, which was innocent of any warmth. He set himself very firmly upon his feet, which were wide apart, and put his hands under his coat tails in the proverbial attitude of an Englishman. To see him standing there you would have thought him a man who never would yield ; and yet he had, as his wife said, yielded to a great many vagaries of the girls. She gave various curious little glances of investigation at him from over her wools.

‘I should like to know,’ she said, ‘why you object

so much to Mr. Douglas ? he seems a very gentlemanly young man. Do you know something more of him than we know ?'

' Nobody,' said Mr. Mountford, with solemnity, ' knows any more of the young man than we know.'

' Then why should you be so determined against him ?' persisted his wife.

Mr. Mountford fixed his eyes severely upon her. ' Letitia,' he said, ' there is one thing, above all others, that I object to in a man ; it is when nobody knows anything about him. You will not deny that I have had some experience in life ; some experience you must grant me, whatever my deficiencies may be ; and the result of all I have observed is that a man whom nobody knows is not a person to connect yourself with. If he is a member of a well-known family—like our own, for instance—there are his people to answer for him. If, on the other hand, he has made himself of consequence in the world, that may answer the same purpose. But when a man is nobody, you have nothing to trust to ; he may be a very good sort of person ; there may be no harm in

him ; but the chances are against him. At all times the chances are heavily against a man whom nobody knows.'

Mr. Mountford was not disinclined to lay down the law, but he seldom did it on an abstract question ; and his wife looked at him, murmuring 'one, two, three' with her lips, while her eyes expressed a certain mild surprise. The feeling, however, was scarcely so strong as surprise ; it was rather with a sensation of unexpectedness that she listened. Surely nobody had a better right to his opinion : but she did not look for a general dogma when she had asked a particular question. 'But,' she said, 'papa ! he was known very well, I suppose, or they would not have had him there—to the Ashleys, at least.'

'What was known ? Nothing about him—nothing whatever about him ! as Anne was so absurd as to say they know *him*, or their own opinion of him ; but they know nothing *about* him—nobody knows anything about him. Whatever you may think, Letitia, that is quite enough for me.'

'Oh, my dear, I don't pretend to understand ,

but we meet a great many people whom we don't know anything of. In society we are meeting them for ever.'

'Pardon me,' said Mr. Mountford, lifting an emphatic finger; '*we* may know nothing about them, but somebody knows. Now, all I hear of this man is that he is nobody; he may be good or he may be bad, much more likely the latter; but, this being the case, if he were an angel I will have nothing to do with him; neither shall anyone belonging to me. We are well-known people ourselves, and we must form connections with well-known people—or none at all.'

'None at all; you would not keep her an old maid, papa?'

'Pshaw!' said Mr. Mountford, turning away. Then he came back to add a last word. 'Understand me, Letitia,' he said; 'I think it's kind of you to do your best for Anne, for she is a girl who has given you a great deal of trouble; but it is of no use; if she is so determined to have her own way, she shall not have anything else. I am not the weak idiot of

a father you think me; if I have given in to her before, there was no such important matter in hand; but I have made up my mind now: and it may be better for Rose and you, perhaps, if the worst comes to the worst.'

Mrs. Mountford was completely roused now; the numbers, so to speak, dropped from her lips; her work fell on her knee. 'It is quite true what you say,' she said, feeling herself on very doubtful ground, and not knowing what to do, whether to express gratitude or to make no reference to this strange and dark saying; 'she has given me a great deal of trouble: but she is your child, St. John, and that is enough for me.'

He did not make any reply; nor did he repeat the mysterious promise of advantage to follow upon Anne's disobedience. He was not so frank with his wife as he had been with his daughter. He went to his writing-table once more, and sat down before it with that air of having come to an end of the subject under discussion which his wife knew so well. He did not mean to throw any further light to her upon

the possible good that might result to Rose. To tell the truth, this possibility was to himself too vague to count for much. In the first place, he expected Anne to be frightened, and to give in ; and, in the second place, he fully intended to live long after both his daughters had married and settled, and to be able to make what dispositions he pleased for years to come. He was not an old man ; he was still under sixty, and as vigorous (he believed) as ever he had been. In such a case a will is a very pretty weapon to flourish in the air, but it does nobody much harm. Mr. Mountford thought a great deal of this threat of his ; but he no more meant it to have any speedy effect than he expected the world to come to an end. Perhaps most of the injustices that people do by will are done in the same way. It is not comprehensible to any man that he should be swept away and others reign in his stead ; therefore he is more free to make use of that contingency than if he believed in it. There would always be plenty of time to set it right ; he had not the least intention of dying ; but for the moment it was something

potent to conjure withal. He reseated himself at his table, with a consciousness that he had the power in his hands to turn his whole world topsy-turvy, and yet that it would not do anybody any harm. Naturally, this feeling was not shared either by Anne, to whom he had made the original threat, nor by his wife, to whom he held out the promise. We all know very well that other people must die—it is only in our own individual case that the event seems unlikely.

Mrs. Mountford's mind was filled with secret excitement; she was eager to know what her husband meant, but she did not venture to ask for any explanation. She watched him over her work with a secret closeness of observation such as she had never felt herself capable of before. What did he mean? what would he do? She knew nothing about the law of inheritance, except that entail kept an estate from the daughters, which was a shame, she thought. But in respect to everything else her mind was confused, and she did not know what her husband could do to benefit Rose at Anne's expense. But the more she did not understand, the more eager

she was to know. When you are possessed by an eager desire for the enrichment of another, it does not seem a bad or selfish object as it might do if the person to be benefited was yourself ; and, least of all, does it ever appear that to look out for the advantage of your child can be wrong. But the poor lady was in the uncomfortable position of not being able to inquire further. She could not show herself too anxious to know what was to happen after her husband's death ; and even to take 'the worst' for granted was not a pleasant thing, for Mrs. Mountford, though naturally anxious about Rose, was not a hard woman who would wilfully hurt anyone. She sat for some time in silence, her heart beating very fast, her ears very alert for any word that might fall from her husband's mouth. But no word came from his mouth. He sat and turned over the papers on the table ; he was pleased to have excited her interest, her hopes and fears, but he did not half divine the extent to which he had excited her, not feeling for his own part that there was anything in it to warrant immediate expectation ; while she, on the other hand,

though she had a genuine affection for her husband, could not help saying to herself, ‘He may go any day; there is never a day that some one does not die; and if he died while he was on these terms with Anne, what was it, what was it, that might perhaps happen to Rose?’ Mrs. Mountford turned over in her mind every possible form of words she could think of in which to pursue her inquiries; but it was very difficult, nay, impossible, to do it; and, though she was not altogether without artifice, her powers altogether failed her in presence of this difficult question. At length she ventured to ask, clearing her throat with elaborate precaution,

‘Do you mean to say that if Anne sets her heart upon her own way, and goes against you—all our children do it more or less; one gets accustomed to it, St. John—do you mean to say—that you will change your will, and put her out of the succession?—’ Mrs. Mountford faltered over the end of her sentence, not knowing what to say.

‘There is no succession. What I have is my own to do what I like with it,’ he said sharply; and

then he opened a big book which lay on the table, and began to write. It was a well-known, if tacit, signal between them, that his need of social intercourse was over, and that his wife might go; but she did not move for some time. She went on with her work, with every appearance of calm; but her mind was full of commotion. As her needle went through and through the canvas, she cast many a furtive glance at her husband turning over the pages of his big book, writing here and there a note. They had been as one for twenty years; two people who were, all the world said, most 'united'—a couple devoted to each other. But neither did she understand what her husband meant, nor could he have believed the kind of feeling with which, across her worsted work, she kept regarding him. She had no wish but that he should live and thrive. Her position, her personal interests, her importance were all bound up in him; nevertheless, she contemplated the contingency of his death with a composure that would have horrified him, and thought with much more keen and earnest feeling of what would

follow than any alarm of love as to the possibility of the speedy ending of his life produced in her. Thus the two sat within a few feet of each other, life-long companions, knowing still so little of each other —the man playing with the fears and hopes of his dependents, while smiling in his sleeve at the notion of any real occasion for those fears and hopes ; the woman much more intent upon the problematical good fortune of her child than on the existence of her own other half, her closest and nearest connection, with whom her life had been so long identified. Perhaps the revelation of this feeling in her would have been the most cruel disclosure had both states of mind been made apparent to the eye of day. There was not much that was unnatural in his thoughts, for many men like to tantalise their successors, and few men realise with any warmth of imagination their own complete withdrawal from the pains and pleasures of life ; but to know that his wife could look his death in the face without flinching, and think more of his will than of the event which must precede any effect it could have, would

have penetrated through all his armour and opened his eyes in the most dolorous way. But he never suspected this ; he thought, with true human fatuity, with a little gratified importance and vanity, of the commotion he had produced—that Anne would be ‘pulled up’ in her career by so serious a threat ; that Rose would be kept ‘up to the mark’ by a flutter of hope as to the reward which might fall to her. All this it pleased him to think of. He was complacent as to the effect of his menaces and promises, but at bottom he felt them to be of no great consequence to himself—amusing rather than otherwise ; for he did not in the least intend to die.

At last Mrs. Mountford felt that she could stay no longer. She rose up from her chair, and gathered her woools in one arm. ‘The girls will be coming in from their ride,’ she said. ‘I must really go.’

The girls had all the machinery of life at Mount in their hands ; in other houses it is ‘the boys’ that are put forward as influencing everything. The engagements and occupations of the young people map out the day, and give it diversity, though the

elder ones move the springs of all that is most important. It was generally when ‘the girls’ were busy in some special matter of their own that Mrs. Mountford came to ‘sit with’ her husband in the library, and furnished him with so much information. But their positions had been changed to-day. It was he who had been her informant, telling her about things more essential to be known than any of her gossip about Anne’s intentions or Rose’s habits. She lingered even as she walked across the floor, and dropped her little plaited sheaf of many colours and stooped to pick it up, inviting further confidence. But her husband did not respond. He let her go without taking any notice of her proceedings or asking any question as to her unusual reluctance to leave him. At last, when she had fairly turned her back upon him, and had her hand upon the handle of the door, his voice startled her, and made her turn round with anxious expectation.

‘By the way,’ he said, ‘I forgot to tell you: I have a letter to-day from Heathcote Mountford,

offering a visit. I suppose he wants to spy out the nakedness of the land.'

'Heathcote Mountford!' cried his wife, bewildered; then added, after a little interval, 'I am sure he is quite welcome to come when he pleases—he or anyone. There is no nakedness in the land that we need fear.'

'He is coming next week,' said Mr. Mountford.  
'Of course, as you perceive, I could not refuse.'

Mrs. Mountford paused at the door, with a great deal of visible interest and excitement. It was no small relief to her to find a legitimate reason for it. 'Of course you could not refuse: why should you refuse? I shall be very glad to see him; and'—she added, after a momentary pause, which gave the words significance, 'so will the girls.'

'I wish I could think so; the man is forty,' Mr. Mountford said. Then he gave a little wave of his hand, dismissing his wife. Even the idea of a visit from his heir did not excite him. He was not even conscious, for the moment, of the hostile feeling with which men are supposed to regard their heirs in

general, and which, if legitimate in any case, is certainly so in respect to an heir of entail. It is true that he had looked upon Heathcote Mountford with a mild hatred all his life as his natural enemy ; but at the present crisis the head of the house regarded his successor with a kind of derisive complacency, as feeling that he himself was triumphantly ‘keeping the fellow out of it.’ He had never been so certain of living long, of cheating all who looked for his death, as he was after he had made use of that instrument of terrorism against his daughter. Heathcote Mountford had not been at Mount for nearly twenty years. It pleased his kinsman that he should offer to come now, just to be tantalised, to have it proved to him that his inheritance of the family honours was a long way off, and very problematical in any sense. ‘A poor sort of fellow ; always ailing, always delicate ; my life is worth two of his,’ he was saying, with extreme satisfaction, in his heart.

## CHAPTER XI.

## PROJECTS OF MARRIAGE.

THE girls had just come in from their ride ; they were in the hall awaiting that cup of tea which is the universal restorative, when Mrs. Mountford with her little sheaf of wools went to join them. They heard her come softly along the passage which traversed the house, from the library, in quite the other end of it, to the hall,—a slight shuffle in one foot making her step recognisable. Rose was very clear-sighted in small matters, and it was she who had remarked that, after having taken her work to the library ‘to sit with papa,’ her mother had generally a much greater acquaintance with all that was about to happen on the estate or in the family affairs. She held up her finger to Anne as the step was heard approaching. ‘Now we shall hear the

last particulars,' Rose said; 'what is going to be done with us all, and if we are to go to Brighton, and all that is to happen.' Anne was much less curious on these points. Whether the family went to Brighton or not mattered little to her. She took off her hat, and smoothed back her hair from her forehead. It was October by this time, and no longer warm; but the sun was shining, and the afternoon more like summer than autumn. Old Saymore had brought in the tray with the tea. There was something on his very lips to say, but he did not desire the presence of his mistress, which checked his confidences with the young ladies. Anne, though supposed generally to be proud, was known by the servants to be very gentle of access, and ready to listen to anything that concerned them. And as for Rose, old Saymore—who had, so to speak, seen her born—did not feel himself restrained by the presence of Rose. 'I had something to ask Miss Anne,' he said, in a kind of undertone, as if making a remark to himself.

'What is it, Saymore?'

‘No, no,’ said the old man, shaking his head. ‘No, no ; I am not such a fool as I look. There is no time now for my business. No, no, Miss Anne, no, no,’ he went on, shaking his head as he arranged the cups and saucers. The sun, though it had passed off that side of the house, had caught in some glittering thing outside, and sent in a long ray of reflection into the huge old dark mirror which filled up one side of the room. Old Saymore, with his white locks, was reflected in this from top to toe, and the shaking of the white head produced a singular commotion in it like circles in water. He was always very deliberate in his movements ; and as Mrs. Mountford’s step stayed in the passage, and a sound of voices betrayed that she had been stopped by some one on the way, Rose, with ideas of ‘fun’ in her mind, invited the arrested confidence. ‘Make haste and speak,’ she said, ‘Saymore ; mamma has stopped to talk to Worth. There is no telling how long it may be before she comes here.’

‘If it’s Mrs. Worth, it may be with the same object, miss,’ said Saymore, with solemnity. And

then he made a measured, yet sidelong step towards Anne. ‘I hope, Miss Anne, you’ll not disapprove?’

‘What do you want me to approve of, Saymore? I don’t think it matters very much so long as mamma is pleased.’

‘It matters to me, Miss Anne; it would seem unnatural to do a thing that was really an important thing without the sanction of the family; and I come from my late lady’s side, Miss Anne. I’ve always held by you, miss, if I may make so bold as to say it.’

Saymore made so bold as to say this often, and it was perfectly understood in the house; indeed it was frequently supposed by new-comers into the servants’ hall that old Saymore was a humble relation of the family on that side.

‘It is very kind of you to be so faithful; tell me quickly what it is, if you want to say it to me privately, and not to mamma.’

‘Miss Anne, I am an old man,’ he said; ‘you’ll perhaps think it unbecoming. I’m a widower, miss, and I’ve no children nor nobody belonging to me.’

‘We’ve known all that,’ cried Rose, breaking in, ‘as long as we’ve lived.’

Saymore took no notice of the interruption ; he did not even look at her, but proceeded with gravity, though with a smile creeping to the corners of his mouth. ‘And some folks do say, Miss Anne, that, though I’m old, I’m a young man of my years. There is a deal of difference in people. Some folks is older, some younger. Yourself, Miss Anne, if I might make so bold as to say so, you’re not a *young* lady for your years.’

‘No, is she?’ said Rose. ‘I always tell you so, Anne ! you’ve no imagination, and no feelings ; you are as serious as the big trees. Quick, quick, Saymore, mamma is coming.’

‘I’ve always been considered young-looking,’ said old Saymore, with a complacent smile, ‘and many and many a one has advised me to better my condition. That might be two words for themselves and one for me, Miss Anne,’ he continued, the smile broadening into a smirk of consciousness. ‘Ladies is very pushing now-a-days ; but I think I’ve picked

out one as will never deceive me, and, if the family don't have any objections, I think I am going to get married, always hoping, Miss Anne, as you don't disapprove.'

'To get married?' said Anne, sitting upright with sheer amazement. Anne's thoughts had not been occupied on this subject as the thoughts of girls often are; but it had entered her imagination suddenly, and Anne's imagination was of a superlative kind, which shed a glory over everything that occupied it. This strange, beautiful, terrible, conjunction of two had come to look to her the most wonderful, mysterious, solemn thing in the world since it came within her own possibilities. All the comedy in it which is so apt to come uppermost had disappeared when she felt herself walking with Cosmo towards the verge of that unknown and awful paradise. Life had not turned into a tragedy indeed, but into a noble, serious poem, full of awe, full of wonder, entering in by those great mysterious portals, which were guarded as by angels of love and fate. She sat upright in her chair, and gazed with

wide open eyes and lips apart at this caricature of her fancy. Old Saymore? the peal of laughter with which Rose received the announcement was the natural sentiment; but Anne had not only a deep sense of horror at this desecration of an idea so sacred, but was also moved by the secondary consciousness that old Saymore too had feelings which might be wounded, which added to her gravity. Saymore, for his part, took Rose's laugh lightly enough, but looked at her own grave countenance with rising offence. 'You seem to think that I haven't no right to please myself, Miss Anne,' he said.

'But who is the lady? tell us who is the lady,' cried Rose.

Saymore paused and held up a finger. The voices in the corridor ceased. Some one was heard to walk away in the opposite direction, and Mrs. Mountford's soft shuffle advanced to the hall. 'Another time, Miss Anne, another time,' he said, in a half whisper, shaking his finger in sign of secrecy. Then he walked towards the door, and held it open

for his mistress with much solemnity. Mrs. Mountford came in more quickly than usual ; she was half angry, half laughing. ‘ Saymore, I think you are an old fool,’ she said.

Saymore made a bow which would have done credit to a courtier. ‘ There’s a many, madam,’ he replied, ‘ as has been fools like me.’ He did not condescend to justify himself to Mrs. Mountford, but went out without further explanation. He belonged to the other side of the house ; not that he was not perfectly civil to his master’s second wife—but she was always ‘ the new mistress’ to Saymore, though she had reigned at Mount for nearly twenty years.

‘ What does he mean, mamma ? ’ cried Rose, with eager curiosity. She was fond of gossip, about county people if possible, but, if not, about village people, or the servants in the house, it did not matter. Her eyes shone with amazement and excitement. ‘ Is it old Worth ? who is it ? What fun to have a wedding in the house ! ’

‘ He is an old fool,’ said Mrs. Mountford, putting

the wools out of her arm and placing herself in the most comfortable chair. ‘ Give me a cup of tea, Rose. I have been standing in the corridor till I’m quite tired, and before that with papa.’

‘ You were not standing when you were with papa ? ’

‘ Well, yes, part of the time ; he has a way—Anne has it too, it is very tiresome—of keeping the most important thing he has to say till the last moment. Just when you have got up and got to the door, and think you are free, then he tells you. It is very tiresome—Anne is just the same—in many things she is exceedingly like papa.’

‘ Then he told you something important ? ’ cried Rose, easily diverted from the first subject. ‘ Are we to go to Brighton ? What is going to happen ? I told Anne you would have something to tell us when we heard you had been sitting with papa.’

‘ Of course we consult over things when we get a quiet hour together,’ Mrs. Mountford said ; and then she made a pause. Even Anne felt her heart beat. It seemed natural that her own affairs should have

been the subject of this conference ; for what was there in the family that was half so interesting as Anne's affairs ? A little colour came to her face, then fled again, leaving her more pale than usual.

'If it was about me, I would rather not have my affairs talked over,' she said.

'My dear Anne,' said Mrs. Mountford, 'try not to get into the way of thinking that everything that is interesting in the family must come from you ; this is a sort of way that girls get when they begin to think of love and such nonsense ; but I should have expected more sense from you.'

Love and such nonsense ! Anne's countenance became crimson. Was this the way to characterise that serious, almost solemn, mystery which had taken possession of her life ? And then the girl, in spite of herself, laughed. She felt herself suddenly placed beside old Saymore in his grotesque sentiment, and between scorn and disgust and unwilling amusement words failed her ; then the others laughed, which made Anne more angry still.

'I am glad to hear you laugh,' said Mrs. Mount-

ford, ‘for that shows you are not so much on your high horse as I fancied you were. And yours is such a very high horse, my dear! No, I don’t mean to say you were not referred to, for you would not believe me; there was some talk about you; but papa said he had spoken to you himself, and I never make nor meddle between him and you, as you know, Anne. It was something quite different. We are not going to Brighton, Rosie; some one is coming here.’

‘Oh—h!’ Rose’s countenance fell. Brighton, which was a break upon the monotony of the country, was always welcome to her. ‘And even Willie Ashley gone away!’ was the apparently irrelevant observation she made, with a sudden drooping of the corners of her mouth.

‘What is Willie Ashley to you? you can’t have your game in winter,’ said her mother, with unconscious cynicism; ‘but there is somebody coming who is really interesting. I don’t know that you have ever seen him; I have seen him only once in my life. I thought him the most interest-

ing-looking man I ever saw ; he was like a hero on the stage, tall and dark, with a natural curl in his hair ; and such eyes ! ’

Rose’s blue and inexperienced orbs grew round and large with excitement. ‘ Who is it ? No one we ever saw ; oh, no, indeed, I never saw a man a bit like that. Who is it, mamma ? ’

Mrs. Mountford liked to prolong the excitement. It pleased her to have so interesting a piece of news in hand. Besides, Anne remained perfectly unmoved, and to excite Rose was too easy. ‘ He is a man with a story too,’ she said. ‘ When he was quite young he was in love with a lady, a very grand personage, indeed, quite out of the reach of a poor gentleman like—this gentleman. She was an Italian, and I believe she was a princess or something. That does not mean the same as it does here, you know ; but she was a great deal grander than he was, and her friends would not let her marry him.’

‘ And what happened ? ’ cried Rose breathless, as her mother came to an artful pause. Anne did not

say anything, but she leant forward, and her eyes too had lighted up with interest. It was no part of Mrs. Mountford's plan to interest Anne, but, once entered upon her story, the desire of the artist for appreciation seized upon her.

'What could happen, my dear?' she said, pointedly adding a moral; 'they gave everybody a great deal of trouble for a time, as young people who are crossed in anything always do; but people abroad make very short work with these matters. The lady was married, of course, to somebody in her own rank of life.'

'And the gentleman?—it was the gentleman you were telling us about.'

'The gentleman—poor Heathcote! well, he has got on well enough—I suppose as well as other people. He has never married; but then I don't see how he could marry, for he has nothing to marry upon.'

'Heathcote! do you mean Heathcote Mountford?'

It was Anne who spoke this time—the story had

grown more and more interesting to her as it went on. Her voice trembled a little as she asked this hasty question; it quivered with sympathy, with wondering pain. The lady married somebody—in her own rank in life—the man never married at all, but probably could not because he had nothing to marry on. Was that the end of it all—a dull matter-of-fact little tragedy? She remembered hearing such words before often enough, but never had given them any attention until now.

‘Yes, I mean your cousin Heathcote Mountford. He is coming next week to see papa.’

Rose had been looking from one to another with her round eyes full of excitement. Now she drew a long breath and said in a tone of awe, ‘The heir of the entail.’

‘Yes, the heir of the entail,’ said Mrs. Mountford solemnly. She looked at her daughter, and the one pair of eyes seemed to take fire from the other. ‘He is as poor—as poor as a mouse. Of course he will have Mount when—anything happens to papa. But papa’s life is as good as his. He is thirty-five,

and he has never had much stamina. I don't mean to say that it is so generally, but sometimes a man is quite old at thirty-five.'

At this time very different reflections gleamed across the minds of the girls. 'Papa was nearly forty when mamma married him,' Rose said to herself with great quickness, while the thought that passed through Anne's mind was 'Thirty-five—five years older than Cosmo.' Neither one thing nor the other, it may be said, had much to do with Heathcote Mountford; and yet there was meaning in it, so far as Rose at least was concerned.

She was thoughtful for the rest of the day, and asked her mother several very pertinent questions when they were alone, as 'Where does Heathcote Mountford live? Has he any money at all? or does he do anything for his living? has he any brothers and sisters?' She was determined to have a very clear understanding of all the circumstances of his life.

'Oh yes, my love, he has a little,' Mrs. Mountford said; 'one says a man has nothing when he has

not enough to settle upon ; but most people have a little. I suppose he lives in London in chambers, like most unmarried men. No, he has no brothers and sisters,—but, yes, I forgot there is one—a young one—whom he is very much attached to, people say.'

'And he will have Mount when papa dies,' said Rose. 'How strange that, though papa has two children, it should go away to quite a different person, not even a very near relation! It is very unjust; don't you think it is very unjust? I am sure it is not a thing that ought to be.'

'It is the entail, my dear. You must remember the entail.'

'But what is the good of an entail? If we had had a brother, it might have been a good thing to keep it in the family; but surely, when we have no brother, we are the proper heirs. It would be more right even, if one person were to have it all, that Anne should be the person. *She*,' said Rose, with a little fervour, 'would be sure to take care of me.'

'I think so too, Rosie,' said her mother; 'but

then Anne will not always just be Anne. She will marry somebody, and she will not have a will of her own—at least not *such* a will of her own. There is one way,’ Mrs. Mountford added with a laugh, ‘in which things are sometimes put right, Rose. Do you remember Mr. Collins in Miss Austen’s novel? He came to choose a wife among the Miss Bennets to make up for taking their home from them. I am afraid that happens oftener in novels than in real life. Perhaps,’ she said, laughing again, but with artificial mirth, ‘your cousin Heathcote is coming to look at you girls to see whether he would like one of you for his wife.’

‘I daresay,’ said Rose calmly; ‘that went through my mind too. He would like Anne, of course, if he could get her; but then Anne—likes somebody else.’

‘There are more people than Anne in the world,’ said the mother, with some indignation. ‘Anne! we all hear so much of Anne that we get to think there is nobody like her. No, my pet, a man of Heathcote Mountford’s age—it is not anything like

Anne he is thinking of; they don't want tragedy queens at that age; they want youth.'

' You mean, mamma, said Rose, still quite serious, 'that he would like me best.'

' My pet, we don't talk of such things. It is quite time enough when they happen, if they ever happen.'

' But I prefer to talk about them,' said Rose. ' It would be very nice to keep Mount; but then, if Anne had all the money, what would be the good of Mount? We, I mean, could never keep it up.'

' This is going a very long way,' said her mother, amused; ' you must not talk of what most likely will never happen. Besides, there is no telling what changes may take place. Anne has not pleased papa, and no one can say what money she may have and what you may have. That is just what nobody can tell till the time comes.'

' You mean—till papa dies?'

' Oh, Rosie,' said Mrs. Mountford, alarmed, ' don't be so plain-spoken, dear; don't let us think of such a

thing. What would become of us if anything happened to dear papa ?'

'But it must happen some time,' said Rose, calmly, 'and it will not happen any sooner because we speak of it. I hope he will live a long time, long after we are both married and everything settled. But if one of us was rich, it would not be worth her while to marry Heathcote, unless she was very fond of Mount ; and I don't think we are so very fond of Mount. And if one of us was poor, it would not be worth *his* while, because he would not be able to keep it up.'

'That is the very best conclusion to come to,' said her mother ; 'since it would not be worth while either for the rich one or the poor one, you may put that out of your head and meet him at your ease, as you ought to meet an elderly cousin.'

'Thirty-five is not exactly elderly—for a man,' said Rose, thoughtfully. She did not put the question out of her mind so easily as her mother suggested. 'But I suppose it is time to go and dress,' she added, with a little sigh. 'No Brighton, and winter coming on, and nobody here, not even Willie

Ashley. I hope he will be amusing at least,' she said, sighing again, as she went away.

Mrs. Mountford followed slowly with a smile on her face. She was not sorry, on the whole, to have put the idea into her child's head. Even when the Mountfords of Mount had been poor, it was 'a very nice position'—and Heathcote had something enough to live upon: and Rose would have something. If they 'fancied' each other, worse things might happen. She did not feel inclined to oppose such a consummation. It would be better than marrying Willie Ashley, or—for of course *that* would be out of the question—wanting to marry him. Mrs. Mountford knew by experience what it was for a girl to spend all her youth in the unbroken quiet of a house in the country which was not really a great house. She had been thirty when she married Mr. Mountford, and before that time there had occurred sundry passages, involving at least one ineligible young man, which had not quite passed from her memory. How was it possible to help it?—a girl must do something to amuse herself, to occupy the time that hangs so heavily on her hands. And often, she reflected,

before you know what you are doing, it has become serious, and there is no way out of it. As she looked back she remembered many instances in which this had happened. Better, far better, an elderly cousin with an old though small estate, than the inevitable clergyman or Willie Ashley. And thirty-five, for a man, was not an age to make any objection to.

She went upstairs with her head full of such thoughts, and there once more she found Mrs. Worth, with whom she had held so earnest a colloquy in the corridor, while Saymore opened his heart to his young ladies. Mrs. Worth shook her head when her mistress addressed a question to her. She pinned on the lace pelerine with which it was Mrs. Mountford's pride to make her old dresses look nice for the evening, with many shakings of her head.

'I don't know, ma'am, as I shall ever bring her to hear reason,' Mrs. Worth said. 'I tell her as a good worthy man, and a nice little bit of money, is not for any girl to despise, and many that is her betters would be glad of the chance. But "you can't put an old head on young shoulders," as the saying is, and I don't know as I shall ever bring her to hear

reason. There's things as nothing will teach us but experience ma'am,' Mrs. Worth said.

' Well, he *is* old for such a girl, said Mrs. Mountford, candidly ; ' we must not be too hard upon her, Worth.'

' Old, ma'am ! well, in one way he may be called old,' said the confidential maid ; ' but I don't call it half so bad when they're that age as when they're just betwixt and between, both old and young, as you may say. Forty or so, that *is* a worry ; but sixty-five you can do with. If I've told her that once I've told her fifty times ; but she pays no attention. And when you think what a nice little bit of money he's put away since he's been here, and how respectable he is, and respected by the family ; and that she has nothing, poor girl ! and nobody but me to look to ! I think, if Miss Anne were to speak a word to her, ma'am, perhaps it would make a difference. They think a deal more of what a young lady says, like themselves, so to speak, than an old person like me.'

## CHAPTER XII.

## MISTRESS AND MAID.

ANNE had gone upstairs some time before. At this time of her life she liked to be alone, and there were many reasons why solitude should be dear to her. For one thing, those who have just begun to thread the flowery ways of early love have always a great deal to think of. It is an occupation in itself to retrace all that has been done and said, nay, even looked and thought, and to carry this dream of recollection on into the future, adding what shall be to what has been. A girl does not require any other business in life when she has this delightful maze awaiting her, turning her room into a *Vita nuova*, another life which she can enter at her pleasure, shutting impenetrable doors upon all vulgar sights and sounds. In addition to this, which needed no

addition, she had something active and positive to occupy her. She had answered Cosmo's letter, thanking him for his offer to deny himself, to be silent if she wished him to be silent. But Anne declared that she had no such wish. ‘Do not let us make a folly of our correspondence,’ she had written ; ‘but neither must we deny ourselves this great happiness, dear Cosmo, for the sake of my father. I have told my father that in this point I cannot obey him. I should scorn myself now if I made believe to obey him by giving up such intercourse as we can have. He has not asked this, and I think it would not be honest to offer it. What he wanted was that we should part altogether, and this we are not going to do. Write to me then, not every day, nor even every week, to make it common, but when your heart is full, and it would be an injustice to keep it from me any longer. And so will I to you.’ The bargain, if somewhat highflown, was very like Anne, and on this footing the letters began. Anne very soon felt that her heart was always full, that there was constantly more to say than a sheet of paper could carry ; but

she held by her own rule, and only broke silence when she could not keep it any longer, which gave to her letters a character of intensity and delicate passion most rare and strange, which touched her lover with an admiration which sometimes had a little awe in it. His own letters were delightful to Anne, but they were of a very different character. They were full of genuine love ; for, so far as that went, there was nothing fictitious in his sentiments ; but they were steadygoing weekly letters, such as a man pens on a certain day and sends by a certain post, not only to the contentment of his own heart, but in fulfilment of what is expected of him, of what it is indeed his duty to do. This made a great difference ; and Cosmo—who was full of intellectual perceptions and saw more clearly than, being not so complete in heart as in mind, it was to his own comfort to see—perceived it very clearly, with an uneasy consciousness of being ‘not up to’ the lofty strain which was required of him. But Anne, in her innocence and inexperience, perceived it not. His letters were delightful to her. The words

seemed to glow and shine before her eyes. If there was a tame expression, a sentence that fell flat, she set it down to that reticence of emotion, that English incapacity for saying all that is felt and tendency to depreciate itself, which we all believe in, and which counts for so much in our estimates of each other. These letters, as I have said, added an actual something to be done to the entrancing occupation of 'thinking over' all that had happened and was going to happen. Whenever she had a little time to spare, Anne, with her heart beating, opened the little desk in which she kept these two or three precious performances. I think, indeed, she carried the last always about her, to be re-read whenever an occasion occurred: and it was with her heart intent upon this gratification, this secret delight which nobody knew of, that she went into her room, leaving her sister and stepmother still talking over their tea in the hall. More sweet to her than the best of company was this pleasure of sitting alone.

But on this occasion she found herself not alone. Though the dressing-bell would not ring for about

an hour, Keziah was already there preparing her young lady's evening toilette. She was standing with her back to the door laying out Anne's dress upon the bed, and crying softly to herself. Keziah was very near Anne's age, and they had been in a manner brought up together, and had known everything that had happened to each other all their lives. This makes a bond between mistress and maid, not common in the ordinary relationships which we form and break so easily. To see Keziah crying was not a matter of indifference to Anne; but neither was it a matter of alarm, for it was not difficult to make Keziah cry. Some one, no doubt, had been scolding the girl; her aunt, who was very strict with her, or the cook, who was half-house-keeper and apt to find fault with the younger servants. Anne stepped forward with her light foot, which Keziah, in her agitation, did not hear, and put her hand on the girl's shoulder. But this, which was done in all kindness, had tragical results. Keziah started violently, and a great big tear, as large as half-a-crown, fell upon the airy skirts of

the dress which she was opening out on the bed. The poor girl uttered a shriek of dismay.

‘Oh, Miss Anne! I didn’t mean it, I didn’t mean it!’ she cried.

‘What is it, Keziah? There is no harm done; but why are you crying? Has anything happened at home? Have you bad news? or is it only Worth that has been cross again?’

‘I’m silly, Miss Anne, that’s what it is,’ said Keziah, drying her eyes. ‘Oh, don’t pity me, please, or I’ll only cry more! Give me a good shaking; that’s what I want, as aunt always says.’

‘Has she been scolding you?’ said Anne. It was not the first time that she had found Keziah in tears; it was not an alarming occurrence, nor did it require a very serious cause.

‘But to think,’ cried the girl, ‘that I should be such a silly, me that ought to know better, as to go and cry upon an Indian muslin, that oughtn’t to go to the wash not for ever so long! Aunt would never forgive me if she knew; and oh, I’m bad enough already without that! If I could only tell you, Miss

Anne ! Morning or evening she never lets me be. It's that as makes me so confused, I don't know what I'm doing. Sometimes I think I'll just take and marry him, to have done with him and her too.

'Marry him ? is that what is the matter ? It must be some one you don't like, or you wouldn't cry so.'

'It isn't so much that I don't like him. If that was all,' said Keziah, with philosophy, 'I wouldn't mind so much. Many a girl has had the same to do. You have to take the bitter with the sweet, as aunt always says.'

'Keziah !' exclaimed Anne, with consternation. 'You wouldn't mind ! then what are you crying for ? And why do you try to cheat me into sympathy,' cried the young lady, indignantly, 'if you don't mind, as you say ?'

Keziah by this time had mastered her tears. She had dried the spot carefully and tenderly with a handkerchief, pressing the muslin between two folds.

'Miss Anne,' she said, 'don't you say as I'm cheating, or my heart will break. That is one

thing nobody can say of me. I tell him honest that I can't abide him, and if he will have me after that, is it my fault? No, it's not that,' she said shaking her head with the melancholy gravity of superior experience: 'I wasn't thinking just of what I'd like. You ladies do what you please, and when you're crossed, you think the world is coming to an end; but in our class of life, you're brought up to know as you can't have your own way.'

'It is not a question of having your own way. How could you marry a man you did not—love?' cried Anne, full of wrath and indignation, yet with awe of the sacred word she used. Was it too fine a word to be used to little Keziah? The girl gazed at her for a moment, half-roused, half-wondering; then shook her head again.

'Oh, Miss Anne, *love*! a girl couldn't love an old man like that; and he don't look for it, aunt says. And he'd think a deal of me, more than—than others might. It's better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave. And he's got plenty of money—I don't know how much—in the bank; and mother

and all of us so poor. He would leave it to me, every penny. You can't just hear that, Miss Anne, can you, and take no notice? There's a deal to be said for him, I don't deny it; and if it was only not being fond of him, I shouldn't mind that.'

'Then you must not ask me to be sorry for you,' said Anne, with stern severity, 'if you could sell yourself for money, Keziah! But, no, no, you could not do it, it is not possible—you, a girl just my age, and brought up with me. You could not do it, Keziah. You have lived here with me almost all your life.'

'Miss Anne, you don't understand. You've been used to having your own way; but the like of us don't get our own way. And aunt says many a lady does it and never minds. It's not that,' said Keziah, with a fresh outburst of tears. 'I hope said could do my duty by a man whether I was fond of him or whether I wasn't. No, it isn't that: it's—it's the other one, Miss Anne.'

And here the little girl hid her face in her hands and sobbed; while Anne, her sternness melting in

s spite of herself, stood looking on with the face of the recording angel, horrified by this new admission and reluctant to write it down.

‘Is there—another?’ she asked in a whisper of horror.

Keziah uncovered her face; the tone in which she was addressed curdled her blood; she turned her white, little, tear-stained countenance to her mistress with an appalled look of guilt. She had not understood before, poor little girl, how guilty she was. She had not known that it was guilt at all. She was herself standing at the bar, a poor little tremulous criminal in the blaze of Anne’s indignant eyes.

‘Yes, Miss Anne.’ Keziah’s voice was almost inaudible; but her eyes kept an astonished appeal in them against the tremendous sentence that seemed to await her.

‘Another whom you love. And you would give him up for this man who is rich, who can leave you his money? Keziah! if this were true, do you know what you would deserve? But I cannot believe it is true.’

‘Miss Anne !’ The poor little culprit regained a little courage ; the offence of a mercenary marriage did not touch her conscience, but to be supposed to be laying claim without reason to a real lover went to her heart. ‘Miss Anne ; it’s quite true. We were always sweethearts, always since we were little things. Him and me ; we’ve always kept company. It’s as true—as true ! Nobody can say different,’ cried the girl, with a fresh burst of angry tears. ‘ You have seen him yourself, Miss Anne ; and all the village knows. Ask aunt, if you don’t believe me ; ask anyone. We’re as well known to be keeping company, as well known—as the Beeches on Mount Hill.’

‘ That is not what I mean, Keziah. What I can’t believe is that you could make up your mind to—marry the man who is rich. What ! leave the other whom you love, and marry one whom you don’t love ! However rich he was, you would be miserable ; and he, poor fellow ! would be miserable too.’

‘ Oh, Miss Anne, that’s what I am afraid of !

cried the girl; ‘that’s what I’m always saying to myself. I could face it if it were only me—(for it’s a great thing to be well off, Miss Anne, for us as have been so poor all our lives); but Jim will be miserable; that is what I always say. But what can I do? tell me what can I do.’

‘I will tell you what you can do. Be faithful to Jim, Keziah; be faithful to him whatever anyone says. Marry him, not the other. That is the only thing to do.’

‘Marry him? But how can I marry him when he’s enlisted and gone off for a soldier, and maybe I’ll never see him more?’

‘Enlisted!’ said Anne, for the moment taken aback; but she recovered quickly, seeing the easiest way out of it. ‘Soldiers are allowed to buy themselves out. I would rather a great deal do without a dress and give you the money for his discharge. Anything would be better than to see you sacrifice yourself—sell yourself. Oh, you could not do it! You must not think of it any more.’

‘It’s not me, Miss Anne,’ said Keziah, mournfully; ‘it’s Mr. Saymore and aunt.’

‘Old Saymore! is it old Saymore?’ Anne did not know how to speak with ordinary patience of such a horrible transaction. ‘Keziah, this cannot be put up with for a moment. If they frighten you, *I* will speak to them. Old Saymore! No, Keziah; it is Jim you must marry, since you love him: and no one else.’

‘Yes, Miss Anne,’ said Keziah, very doubtfully; ‘but I don’t know,’ she added, ‘whether Jim wanted me—to marry him. You see he is young, and he had nothing but his weekly wage, when he was in work; and I don’t even know if he wants to buy his discharge. Men is very queer,’ said the girl, shaking her head with profound conviction, ‘and keeping company’s not like marrying. Them that haven’t got you want you, and them that can have you for the asking don’t ask. It is a funny world and men are queer; things is not so straightforward before you to do one or another as you think, Miss Anne.’

‘Then, at all events, there is one thing you can

always do—for it depends upon yourself alone. Marry no one, but be faithful, Keziah ; faithful to Jim if you love him ; and, you may be sure, things will come right at the last.'

' I don't know, Miss Anne,' said Keziah, shaking her head ; ' it seems as if it ought to ; but it don't always, as far as I can see. There's ladies, and real ladies, aunt says, as has just the same before them ; for if the man you like hasn't a penny, Miss Anne, and other folks has plenty, what, even if you're a lady, is a girl to do ? '

' You can always be faithful, whatever happens,' cried Anne, holding her head high ; ' that depends only on yourself.'

' If your folks will let you alone, Miss Anne.' Keziah had dried her tears, and Anne's confidence had given her a little courage ; but still she felt that she had more experience of the world than her mistress, and shook her little head.

' What can your " folks " do, Keziah ? You have only to hold fast and be true,' cried Anne. Her eyes shone with the faith and constancy that were in her.

The very sight of her was inspiring. She looked like a woman who might have rallied an army, standing up with her head high, defying all danger. ‘They may make you unhappy, they may take everything from you ; but only yourself can change you. The whole world cannot do anything to you if you remain true, and stand fast——’

‘Oh, Miss Anne, if we was all like you !’ said the girl, admiring but despondent. But just then the dressing-bell began to ring, and poor Keziah was recalled to her duties. She flew to the drawers and wardrobes to lay out the miscellaneous articles that were needed—the evening shoes, the ribbons, and little ornaments Anne was to wear. Then she lingered for a moment before fulfilling the same office for Rose. ‘Don’t you think, Miss Anne,’ she said, ‘if it comes to *that* at the end : don’t you think I mind for myself. I hope as I’ll do my duty, whoever the man may be. I’m not one to stick to my own way when I see as I can’t get it. It isn’t that I’m *that* bent on pleasing myself——’

‘But Keziah, Keziah !’ cried Anne, provoked,

distressed, and disappointed, ‘when this is what you are thinking of, it is your duty to please yourself.’

‘The Bible don’t say so, Miss Anne,’ said Keziah, with a little air of superior wisdom as she went away.

This discussion made the most curious break in Anne’s thoughts; instead of spending the half-hour in blessed solitude, reading over Cosmo’s last letter or thinking over some of his last words, how strange it was to be thus plunged into the confused and darkling ways of another world, so unlike her own! To the young lady it was an unalterable canon of faith that marriage was only possible where love existed first. Such was the dogma of the matter in England, the first and most important proviso of the creed of youth, contradicted sometimes in practice, but never shaken in doctrine. It was this that justified and sanctified all the rest, excusing even a hundred little departures from other codes, little frauds and compromises which lost all their guilt when done for the sake of love. But here was another code which was very different, in which the

poor little heroine was ashamed to have it thought that, so far as concerned herself, love was the first thing in question. Keziah felt that she could do her duty whoever the man might be; it was not any wish to please herself that made her reluctant. Anne's first impulse of impatience, and annoyance, and disgust at such a view of the question, and at the high ground on which it was held, transported her for the moment out of all sympathy with Keziah. No wonder, she thought, that there was so much trouble and evil deep down below the surface when that was how even an innocent girl considered the matter. But by-and-by Anne's imagination got entangled with the metaphysics of the question, and the clear lines of the old undoubting dogmatism became less clear. 'The Bible don't say so.' What did the Bible say? Nothing at all about it; nothing but a rule of mutual duty on the part of husbands and wives; no guidance for those who were making the first great decision, the choice that must mean happiness or no happiness to their whole lives. But the Bible did say that one was not to seek one's own

way, nor care to please one's self, as Keziah said. Was the little maid an unconscious sophist in her literal adoption of these commands? or was Anne to blame, who, in this point of view, put aside the Bible code altogether, without being aware that she did so? Deny yourself! did that mean that you were to consent to a mercenary union when your heart was against it? Did that mean that you might profane and dishonour yourself for the sake of pleasing others? Keziah thought so, taking the letter as her rule; but how was Anne to think so? Their theories could not have been more different had the width of the world been between them.

And then the story of Heathcote Mountford glanced across her mind. This was what had happened to him. His Italian princess, though she loved him, had done her duty, had married somebody of her own rank, had left the man she loved to bear the desertion as he could. Was it the women who did this, Anne asked herself, while the men were true? It was bitter to the girl to think

so, for she was full of that visionary pride—born both of the chivalrous worship and the ceaseless jibes of which they have been the objects—which makes women so sensitive to all that touches their sex. A flush of shame as visionary swept over her. If this cowardly weakness was common to women, then no wonder that men despised them; then, indeed, they must be inferior creatures, incapable of real nobleness, incapable of true understanding. For a moment Anne felt that she despised and hated her own kind; to be so poor, so weak, so miserable; to persuade the nobler, stronger being by their side that they loved him, and then weakly to abandon him; to shrink away from him for fear of a parent's scolding or the loss of money, or comfort, or luxury! What indignation Anne poured forth upon these despicable creatures! and to call it duty! she cried within herself. When you can decide that one side is quite in the wrong, even though it be your own side, there is consolation in it; then all is plain sailing in the moral element, and no complication

disturbs you. Though she felt it bitter, and humiliating, and shameful, Anne clung to this point of view. She was barely conscious, in the confused panorama of that unknown world that spread around her, of some doubtful points on which the light was not quite so simple and easy to identify. ‘Those that can have you for the asking don’t ask you,’ Keziah said : and she had not been sure that her lover wanted her to marry him, though she believed he would be miserable if she abandoned him. And Heathcote Mountford, though he seemed to be so faithful, had never been rich enough to make inconstancy possible. These were the merest specks of shadow on the full light in which one side of her picture was bathed. But yet they were there.

This made an entire change in Anne’s temper and disposition for the evening. Her mind was full of this question. When she went downstairs she suffered a great many stories to be told in her presence to which, on previous occasions, she would have turned a deaf ear ; and it was astonishing how

many corresponding cases seem to exist in society—the women ‘doing their duty’ weakly, giving in to the influence of some mercenary parent, abandoning love and truth for money and luxury; the men withdrawing embittered, disgusted, no doubt to jibe at women, perhaps to hate them ; to sink out of constancy into misanthropy, into the rusty loneliness of the old bachelor. Her heart grew sad within her as she pondered. Was it to be her fate to vindicate all women, to show what a woman could do ? but for the moment she felt herself too deeply disgusted with her sex to think of defending them from any attack. To be sure, there was that shadow in her picture, that fluctuation, that uncomfortable balance of which she was just conscious—Jim who, perhaps, would not have wanted to marry Keziah, though he loved her ; and the others who could not afford to commit any imprudence, who could marry only when there was a fortune on what Mrs. Mountford would call ‘the other side.’ Anne felt herself cooped in, in the narrowest space, not knowing where to turn ; ‘who

could marry only when there was money on the other side.' Why, this had been said of Cosmo! Anne laughed to herself, with an indignation and wrath, slightly, very slightly, tempered by amusement. Where Cosmo was concerned she could not tolerate even a smile.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## HEATHCOTE MOUNTFORD.

THE visit of the unknown cousin had thus become a very interesting event to the whole household, though less, perhaps, to its head than to anyone else. Mr. Mountford flattered himself that he had nothing of a man's natural repugnance towards his heir. Had that heir been five-and-twenty, full of the triumph and confidence of youth, then indeed it might have been difficult to treat him with the same easy tolerance ; for, whatever may be the chances in your own favour, it would be difficult to believe that a young man of twenty-five would not, one way or the other, manage to outlive yourself at sixty. But Heathcote Mountford had lived, his kinsman thought, very nearly as long as himself ; he had not been a young man for these dozen years. It was half a lifetime

since there had been that silly story about the Italian lady. Nothing can be more easy than to add on a few years to the vague estimate of age which we all form in respect to our neighbours ; the fellow must be forty if he was a day ; and between forty and sixty after all there is so little difference, especially when he of forty is an old bachelor of habits perhaps not too regular or virtuous. Mr. Mountford was one of the people who habitually disbelieve in the virtue of their neighbours. He had never been a man about town, a frequenter of the clubs, in his own person ; and there was, perhaps, a spice of envy in the very bad opinion which he entertained of such persons. A man of forty used up by late hours and doubtful habits is not younger—is as a matter of fact older—than a respectable married man of sixty taking every care of himself, and regular as clock-work in all his ways. Therefore he looked with good-humoured tolerance on Heathcote, at whose rights under the entail he was almost inclined to laugh. ‘ I shall see them all out,’ he said to himself—may he even permitted himself to say this to his wife,

which was going perhaps too far. Heathcote, to be sure, had a younger brother; but then he was well known to be a delicate, consumptive boy.

To the ladies of the family he was more interesting, for various reasons. Rose and her mother regarded him with perfectly simple and uncomplicated views. If he should happen to prove agreeable, if things fitted in and came right, why then—the arrangement was one which might have its advantages. The original estate of Mount which was comprehended in the entail was not a large one, but still it was not unworthy consideration, especially when *he* had a little and *she* had a little besides. Anne, it need not be said, took no such serious contingency into her thoughts. But she too looked for Heathcote's arrival with curiosity, almost with anxiety. He was one who had been as she now was, and who had fallen—fallen from that high estate. He had been loved—as Anne felt herself to be loved; but he had been betrayed. She thought with awe of the anguish, the horror of unwilling conviction, the dying out of all beauty and glory from the world,

which it must have been his to experience. And he had lived long years since then, on this changed earth, under these changed skies. She began to long to see him with a fervour of curiosity which was mingled with pity and sympathy, and yet a certain touch of delicate scorn. How could he have lived after, lived so long, sunk (no doubt) into a dreamy routine of living, as if mere existence was worth retaining without hope or love? She was more curious about him than she had ever been about any visitor before, with perhaps a far-off consciousness that all this might happen to herself, mingling with the vehement conviction that it never could happen, that she was as far above it and secure from it as heaven is from the tempests and troubles of earth.

The much-expected visitor arrived in the twilight of an October evening just before dinner, and his first introduction to the family was in the indistinct light of the fire—one of the first fires of the season, which lighted up the drawing-room with a fitful ruddy blaze shining upon the white dresses of the

girls, but scarcely revealing the elder people in their darker garments. A man in evening dress very often looks his best: but he does not look romantic—he does not look like a hero—the details of his appearance are too much like those of everybody else. Anne, looking at him breathlessly, trying to get a satisfactory impression of him when the light leaped up for a moment, found him too vigorous, too large, too life-like for her fastidious fancy; but Rose was made perfectly happy by the appearance of a man with whom it would not be at all necessary, she thought, to be upon stilts. The sound of his voice when he spoke dispersed ever so many visions. It was not too serious, as the younger sister had feared. It had not the lofty composure which the elder had hoped. He gave his arm to Mrs. Mountford with the air of a man not the least detached from his fellow-creatures. ‘There will be a frost to-night,’ he said; ‘it is very cold outside; but it is worth while being out in the cold to come into a cosy room like this.’ Charley Ashley would have said the very same had it been he who had walked up to dinner

from the rectory. Heathcote had not been in the house for years, not perhaps ever since all *that* had happened, yet he spoke about the cosy room like any chance visitor. It would not be too much to say that there was a certain disgust in the revulsion with which Anne turned from him, though no doubt it was premature to pass judgment on him in the first five minutes like this.

In the light of the dining-room all mystery departed, and he was seen as he was. A tall man, strong, and well developed, with dark and very curly hair tinged all about his temples with grey ; his lips smiling, his eyes somewhat serious, though kindling now and then with a habit of turning quickly round upon the person he was addressing. Four pairs of eyes were turned upon him with great curiosity as he took his seat at Mrs. Mountford's side ; two of them were satisfied, two not so. This, Mr. Mountford felt, was not the rusty and irregular man about town, for whom he had felt a contempt ; still he was turning grey, which shows a feeble constitution. At sixty the master of Mount had not a grey hair in his

head. As for Anne, this grey hair was the only satisfactory thing about him. She was not foolish enough to conclude that it must have turned so in a single night. But she felt that this at least was what might be expected. She was at the opposite side of the table, and could not but give a great deal of her attention to him. His hair curled in sheer wantonness of life and vigour, though it was grey; his voice was round, and strong, and melodious. As he sat opposite to her he smiled and talked, and looked like a person who enjoyed his life. Anne for her own part scarcely took any part in the conversation at all. For the first time she threw back her thoughts upon the Italian princess whom she had so scorned and condemned. Perhaps, after all, it was not she who had suffered the least. Anne conjured up a picture of that forlorn lady sitting somewhere in a dim solitary room in the heart of a great silent palace, thinking over that episode of her youth. Perhaps it was not she, after all, that was so much in the wrong.

‘I started from Sandhurst only this morning,’ he

was saying, ‘after committing all kinds of follies with the boys. Imagine a respectable person of my years playing football! I thought they would have knocked all the breath out of me: yet you see I have survived. The young fellows had a match with men far too strong for them—and I used to have some little reputation that way in old days——’

‘Oh, yes, you were a great athlete; you played for Oxford in University matches, and got ever so many goals.’

‘This is startling,’ Heathcote said; ‘I did not know my reputation had travelled before me; it is a pity it is not something better worth remembering. But what do you know about goals, Miss Mountford, if I may make so bold?’

‘Rose,’ said that little person, who was wreathed in smiles; ‘that is Miss Mountford opposite. I am only the youngest. Oh, I heard from Charley Ashley all about it. We know about goals perfectly well, for we used to play ourselves long ago in the holidays with Charley and Willie—till mamma put a stop to it,’ Rose added, with a sigh.

'I should think I put a stop to it! You played once, I believe,' said Mrs. Mountford, with a slight frown, feeling that this was a quite unnecessary confidence.

'Oh, much oftener; don't you recollect, Anne, you played football too, and you were capital, the boys said?'

Now Anne was, in fact, much troubled by this revelation. She, in her present superlative condition, walking about in a halo of higher things, to be presented to a stranger who was not a stranger, and, no doubt, would soon hear all about her, as a football player, a girl who was athletic, a tom-boy, neither less nor more! She was about to reply with annoyance, when the ludicrous aspect of it suddenly struck her, and she burst into a laugh in spite of herself. 'There is such a thing as an inconvenient memory,' she said. 'I am not proud of playing football now.'

'I am not at all ashamed of it,' said Rose. 'I never should have known what a goal was if I hadn't played. Do you play tennis, *too*, Mr. Heathcote?

It is not too cold if you are fond of it. Charley said you were good at anything—good all round, he said.'

'That is a very flattering reputation, and you must let me thank Mr. Charley, whoever he is, for sounding my trumpet. But all that was a hundred years ago,' Heathcote said; and this made up a little lost ground for him with Anne, for she thought she heard something like a sigh.

'You will like to try the covers,' said Mr. Mountford. 'I go out very little myself now-a-days, and I daresay you begin to feel the damp, too. I don't preserve so much as I should like to do ; these girls are always interfering with their false notions ; but, all the same, I can promise you a few days' sport.'

'Is it the partridges or the poachers that the young ladies patronise ?' Heathcote said.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Mountford, 'what is the use of calling attention to Anne's crotchets ? She has her own way of thinking, Mr. Heathcote. I tell her she must never marry a sportsman. But, indeed, she has a great deal to say for herself. It

does not seem half so silly when you hear what she has got to say.'

Anne presented a somewhat indignant countenance to the laughing glance of the new cousin. She would not be drawn into saying anything in her own defence.

' You will find a little sport, all the same,' said Mr. Mountford ; ' but I go out very seldom myself ; and I should think you must be beginning to feel the damp, too.'

' Not much,' said the younger man, with a laugh. He was not only athletic and muscular, but conscious of his strength, and somewhat proud of it. The vigour in him seemed an affront to all Anne's pre-conceived ideas, as it was to her father's comfortable conviction of the heir's elderliness ; his very looks seemed to cast defiance at these two discomfited critics. That poor lady in the Italian palace ! it could not have been she that was so much in the wrong, after all.

' I like him very much, mamma,' cried Rose, when they got into the drawing-room ; ' I like him

immensely : he is one of the very nicest men I ever saw. Do let us make use of him now he is here. Don't you know that dance you always promised us ? —let us have the dance while Heathcote is here. Old ! who said he was old ? he is delightful ; and so nice-looking, and such pretty curly hair.'

' Hush, my pet, do not be too rapturous ; he is very nice, I don't deny ; but still, let us see how he bears a longer inspection ; one hour at dinner is not enough to form an opinion. How do you like your cousin Heathcote, Anne ? '

' He is not at all what I expected,' Anne said.

' She expected a Don Quixote ; she expected a Lord Byron, with his collar turned down ; somebody that talked nothing but poetry. I am so glad, said Rose, ' he is not like that. I shall not mind Mount going to Heathcote now. He is just my kind of man, not Anne's at all.'

' No, he is not Anne's kind,' said the mother.

Anne did not say anything. She agreed in their verdict ; evidently Heathcote was one of those disappointments of which before she met Cosmo the

world had been full. Many people had excited generally her curiosity, if not in the same yet in a similar way, and these had disappointed her altogether. She did not blame Heathcote. If he was unable to perceive his own position in the world, and the attitude that was befitting to him, possibly it was not his fault. Very likely it was not his fault ; most probably he did not know any better. You cannot expect a man to act contrary to his nature, Anne said to herself ; and she gave up Heathcote with a little gentle disdain. This disdain is the very soul of toleration. It is so much more easy to put up with the differences, the discrepancies, of other people's belief or practice, when you find them inferior, not to be judged by your standards. This was what Anne did. She was not angry with him for not being the Heathcote she had looked for. She was tolerant : he knew no better ; if you look for gold in a pebble, it is not the pebble's fault if you do not find it. This was the mistake she had made. She went to the other end of the room where candles were burning on a table and chairs set

out around. It was out of reach of all the chatter about Heathcote in which she did not agree. She took a book, and set it up before her to make a screen before her gaze, and, thus defended, went off at once into her private sanctuary and thought of Cosmo. Never was there a transformation scene more easily managed. The walls of the Mount drawing-room divided, they gave place to a group of the beeches, with two figures seated underneath, or to a bit of the commonplace road, but no longer commonplace—a road that led to the Manor. What right had a girl to grumble at her companions, or any of their ways, when she could escape in the twinkling of an eye into some such beautiful place, into some such heavenly company, which was all her own? But yet there would come back occasionally, as through a glass, an image of the Italian lady upon whom she had been so hard a little while before. Poor Italian lady! evidently, after all, Heathcote's life had not been blighted. Had she, perhaps, instead of injuring him only blighted her own?

The softly-lighted room, the interchange of soft

voices at one end, the figure at the other intent upon a book, lighting up eyes full of dreams, seemed a sort of enchanted vision of home to Heathcote Mountford when, after an interval, he came in alone, hesitating a little as he crossed the threshold. He was not used to home. A long time ago his own house had been closed up at the death of his mother—not so much closed up but that now and then he went to it with a friend or two, establishing their bachelorhood in the old faded library and drawing-room, which could be smoked in, and had few associations. But the woman's part of the place was all shut up, and he was not used to any woman's part in his life. This, however, was all feminine ; he went in as to an enchanted castle. Even Mrs. Mountford, who was commonplace enough, and little Rose, who was a pretty little girl and no more, seemed wonderful creatures to him who had dropped out of acquaintance with such creatures ; and the elder daughter was something more. He felt a little shy, middle-aged as he was, as he went in. And this place had many associations ; one time or other it

would be his own ; one time or other it might come to pass that he, like his old kinsman, would pass by the drawing-room, and prefer the ease of the library, his own chair and his papers. At this idea he laughed within himself, and went up to Mrs. Mountford on her sofa, who stopped talking when she saw who it was.

‘Mr. Mountford has gone to his own room. I was to tell you he has something to do.’

‘Oh, papa has always an excuse !’ cried Rose ; ‘he never comes here in the evening. I am sure this room is far nicer, and we are far nicer, than sitting there all by himself among those musty books. And he never reads them even ! he puts on his dressing-gown and sits at his ease——’

‘Hush, you silly child ! When a gentleman comes to be papa’s age he can’t be expected to care for the company of girls, even when they are his own. I will take my work and sit with him by-and-by. You must not give your cousin reason to think that you are undutiful to papa.’

‘Oh, never mind !’ said Rose ; ‘Mr. Heathcote, come, and be on my side against mamma. It is so

seldom we have gentlemen staying here--indeed, there are very few gentlemen in the county--there are daughters, nothing but daughters, in most of the houses. And mamma has promised us a dance whenever we could get enough men. I want her to give it while you are here.'

'While I am here; but you don't suppose I am a dancing man?'

'You can dance, I am sure,' said Rose. 'I can see it in your face; and then you would make acquaintance with all the neighbours. It would be dreadful when you come to live here after our time if you do not know a soul. You must make acquaintance with everybody; and it would be far more fun to have a ball than a quantity of dreary dinner-parties. Do come here and be on my side against mamma!'

'How can I be against my kind kinswoman,' he said laughing, 'who has taken me in and received me so graciously, though I belong to the other branch? That would be ingratitude of the basest sort.'

‘Then you must be against me,’ said Rose.

‘That would be impossible !’ he said, with another laugh ; and drew his chair close to the table and threw himself into the discussion. Rose’s bright little countenance lighted up, her blue eyes shone, her cheeks glowed. She got a piece of paper and a pencil, and began to reckon up who could be invited. ‘The men first,’ she said, with the deepest gravity, furtively applying her pencil to her lips to make it mark the blacker as in old school-room days ; ‘the men must go down first, for we are always sure of plenty of girls—but you cannot have a dance without men. First of all, I will put down you. You are one to start with—Mr. Heathcote Mountford ; how funny it is to have a gentleman of the same name, who is not papa !’

‘Ah ! that is because you never had a brother !’ said Mrs. Mountford, with a sigh ; ‘it never seemed at all strange to us at home. I beg your pardon, I am sure, Mr. Heathcote ; of course it would have interfered with you ; but for girls not to have a

brother is sad for them, poor things! It always makes a great deal of difference in a girl's life.'

'What am I to say?' asked Heathcote. 'I am very sorry, but—how can I be sorry when I have just become conscious of my privileges; it is an extremely pleasant thing to step into this vacant post.'

'A second cousin is not like a brother,' said Rose; 'but, anyhow, at a dance you would be the man of the house. And you do dance? if you don't you must learn before the ball. We will teach you, Anne and I.'

'I can dance a little, but I have no doubt lessons would do me good. Now go on; I want to see my comrades and coadjutors.'

Rose paused with her pencil in her hand. 'Mr. Heathcote Mountford, that is one; that is a great thing to begin with. And then there is—then there is—who shall I put down next? who is there else, mamma? Of course Charley Ashley; but he is a clergyman, he scarcely counts. That is why a garden party is better than a dance in the country,

because the clergymen all count for that. I think there is somebody staying with the Woodheads, and there is sure to be half-a-dozen at Meadowlands; shall I put down six for Meadowlands? They must invite some one if they have not so many; all our friends must invite some one—we must insist upon it,' Rose said.

' My dear, that is always the difficulty; you know that is why we have had to give it up so often. In the vacation there is Willie Ashley, he is always somebody.'

' He must come,' cried Rose, energetically, ' for three days—that will be enough—for three days; Charley must write and tell him. And then there is—who is there more, mamma? Mr. Heathcote Mountford, that is an excellent beginning, and he is an excellent dancer, and will go on all the evening through, and dance with everybody. Still, we cannot give a ball with only one man.'

' I will send for my brother and some more of those young fellows from Sandhurst, Mrs. Mountford, if you can put them up.'

‘ If we can put them up ! ’ Rose all but threw herself into the arms of this new cousin, her eyes all but filled with tears of gratitude. She gave a little shriek of eagerness—‘ Of course we can put them up ; oh ! as many as ever you please, as many as you can get :—shall I put down twenty for Sandhurst ? Now we have a real ball in a moment,’ said Rose, with enthusiasm. It had been the object of her desires all her life.

‘ Does Miss Mountford take no interest in the dance ? ’ Heathcote asked.

‘ Anne ? Oh, she will take it up when it comes near the time. She will do a great deal ; she will arrange everything ; but she does not take any pleasure in planning ; and then,’ said Rose, dropping her voice to a whisper—‘ Hush ! don’t look to make her think we are talking of her ; she does not like to be talked of—Mr. Heathcote ! Anne is—engaged.’

‘ My dear child ! ’ cried her mother. ‘ Mr. Heathcote, this is all nonsense ; you must not pay the least attention to what this silly child says. Engaged !—what folly, Rose ! you know your sister is

nothing of the kind. It is nothing but imagination ; it is only your nonsense, it is——'

' You wouldn't dare, mamma, to say that to Anne,' said Rose, with a very solemn face.

' Dare ! I hope I should dare to say anything to Anne. Mr. Heathcote will think we are a strange family when the mother wouldn't *dare* to say anything to the daughter, and her own child taunts her with it. I don't know what Mr. Heathcote would think of us,' said Mrs Mountford, vehemently, ' if he believed what you said.'

' I do not think anything but what you tell me,' said Heathcote, endeavouring to smooth the troubled waters. ' I know there are family difficulties everywhere. Pray don't think of making explanations. I am sure whatever you do will be kind, and whatever Miss Mountford does will spring from a generous heart. One needs only to look at her to see that.'

Neither of the ladies thought he had paid any attention to Anne, and they were surprised—for it had not occurred to them that Anne, preoccupied as

she was, could have any interest for the new comer. They were startled by the quite unfounded confidence in Anne which he thus took it upon him to profess. They exchanged looks of surprise. ‘Yes, Anne has a generous heart—no one can deny that,’ Mrs. Mountford said. It was in the tone of a half-unwilling admission, but it was all the more effective on that account. Anne had listened to their voices, half-pleased thus to escape interruption, half-disgusted to have more and more proofs of the frivolity of the new comer; she had heard a sentence now and then, an exclamation from Rose, and had been much amused by them. She was more startled by the cessation of the sounds, by the sudden fall, the whispering, the undertones, than by the conversation. What could they be talking of now, and why should they whisper as if there were secrets in hand? Next minute, however, when she was almost roused to the point of getting up to see what it was, Mrs. Mountford’s voice became audible again.

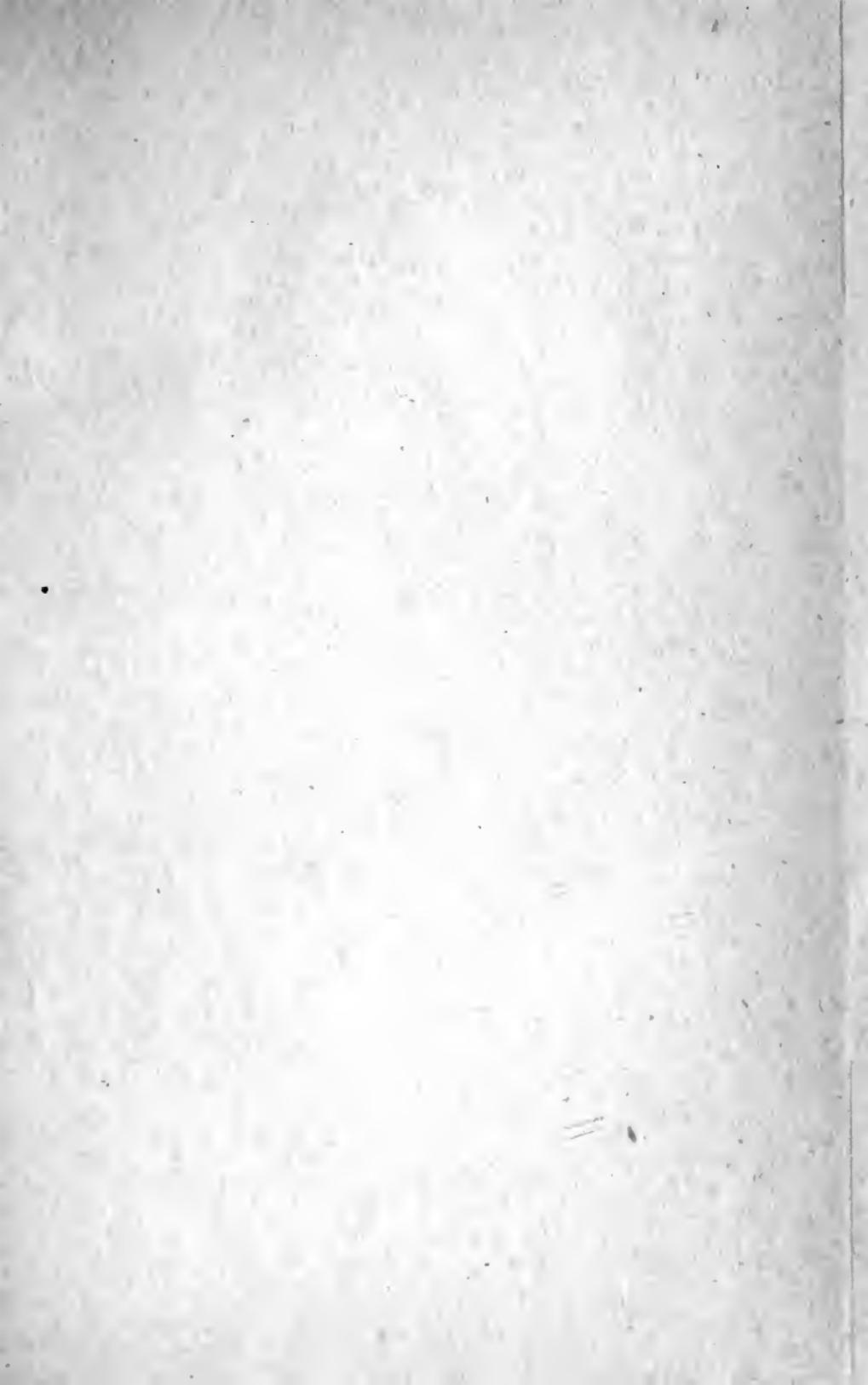
‘Do you sing now, Mr. Heathcote? I remember long ago you used to have a charming voice!’

'I don't know that it was ever very charming ; but such as it is I have the remains of it,' he said.

'Then come and sing something,' said Mrs. Mountford. What was it they had been saying which broke off so suddenly, and occasioned this jump to a different subject ? But Anne composed herself to her dreams again, when she saw the group moving towards the piano. He sang, too, then ! sang and danced and played football, after what had happened to him ? Decidedly, the Italian princess must have had much to be said on her side.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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